

THE BOOK REVIEW

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OCTOBER 1998

VOLUME XXII - NUMBER 10



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Design and Layout

Tulika Print Communication Services
35A/1 (second floor),
Shahpur Jat
(near Asiad Village),
New Delhi 110 049
Telephones 649 7999, 649 1448

Subscription Rates 1998

Single Issue: Rs 25.00
Annual Subscription (12 Issues)
Individual: Rs 250.00 / \$40.00 / £25.00
Institutional: Rs 300.00 / \$60.00 / £35.00
(Inclusive of bank charges and postage)
Life Donors: Rs 5000.00 and above

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Published by Chandra Chari for The Book Review Literary Trust, 239 Vasant Enclave, New Delhi 110 057. T. A/1, Shahpur Jat, New Delhi 110 049. Printed at Paul's Press, E-47/1, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi 110 020. Tulika Print Communication Services Pvt. Ltd., 35

Towards an Understanding of India's Ecumenical Encounters: Playing Host to European Discoveries in the Pre-colonial Era

Lakshmi Subramanian

PORTUGUESE IN THE TAMIL COAST: HISTORICAL EXPLORATIONS
IN COMMERCE AND CULTURE 1507-1749

By S. Jeyaseela Stephen

Navajoshi, 1998, pp. 437, Rs. 400.00

SINNERS AND SAINTS: THE SUCCESSORS OF VASCO DA GAMA

Edited by Sanjay Subrahmanyam

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 212, Rs. 350.00

EUROPEAN COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE IN PRE-COLONIAL INDIA:
THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

By Om Prakash

Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 377, Rs. 950.00

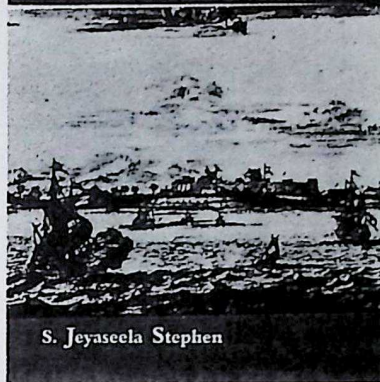
The books under review share one thing in common, an explicit concern with the working of Indian enterprise with all its myriad dimensions and ramifications in South Asia in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Stephen and Om Prakash pursue the story of European encounters into the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Portuguese were replaced by the Dutch and English East India Companies respectively. Subrahmanyam on the other hand prefers to draw attention to new methodological possibilities of 'biography as social history' and fresh approaches deriving from hermeneutics and textual criticism that have emerged in recent studies of Portuguese colonialism. The concern with European enterprise in South Asia during the age of discoveries might at first sight appear to be somewhat of an anachronism particularly after historians have spent years exploding the Eurocentric bias in understanding Asia's maritime profile in the age of sail. A generation of scholars, Ashin Dasgupta, M.N. Pearson, Sinappah Arasaratnam, Melink Roelofz among several others demonstrated the enduring strength and primacy of Asian/Indian maritime enterprise in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and its capacity to deflect the aggression and hostility of European competition in the Indian seas. The impression, however, quickly disappears once we rec-

ognize that the European factor is essentially deployed as a reference point to understand, reconstruct and evaluate the trading milieu of the Indian merchant and the world view of his sovereign. This is particularly true of Om Prakash's work that synthesizes some of the most important and up-to-date research on India's pre-colonial trade and seeks to understand the nature of the European presence in the subcontinent and the Indian ocean and its impact upon the Indian trading world and its operators. Stephen Jeyaseela, notwithstanding his impressive data base does not quite achieve the same results and slips inadvertently into stereotyped assumptions that he professes to contest.

Historical writings on Indo-European trade in the Indian Ocean have for long tended to fall into one of two categories. Following the intrepid civil servant turned historian W.H. Moreland, there emerged a substantial corpus of writing that stressed the significance of the European encounter ascribing to European enterprise an absolute superiority in the realm of shipping and export trade. The advent of the Europeans, the Portuguese and more so the Dutch and the Europeans was seen to displace Indian maritime activity especially in the realm of shipping and export. Europeans battled against odds to carve for themselves a preponderant position, and had to take on the capricious Indian State which

PORTUGUESE IN THE TAMIL COAST

Historical Explorations in
Commerce and Culture 1507-1749



S. Jeyaseela Stephen

hardly recognized notions of trade. Suddenly, historians using the same sources that Moreland had chanced upon, i.e., the official papers of the European East India Companies, claimed to rewrite the history of Maritime India without, however, moving away from the point of view of the European commercial factor. The result was that their analysis once again invariably emphasized the Europeans as senior partners of commercial enterprises and obscured the Indian merchant and misrepresented the Indian State's politics and assumptions. It was thus not entirely fortuitous that scholars stressed the arbitrary nature of the Mughal state's dealings with the European companies or that their accounts of sixteenth and seventeenth century Indian trade dealt with the haggling of European factors in Indian port towns and production centres and concentrated almost wholly on the Companies' trade with Europe. This approach was contested by a succeeding generation of historians like Ashin Dasgupta, M.N. Pearson, Genevieve Bouchon, A.R. Disney, Sanjay Subrahmanyam among others who used European sources more critically to upstage the faceless Asian merchant and map his terrain within the world system of the Indian Ocean. M.N. Pearson demonstrated the significance of the Gujarati carrying trade in spices and textiles within the Indian Ocean, that far exceeded in volume and value the trade in pepper between India and Europe on Portuguese Naos while drawing attention to the emergence of the unofficial Indo-Portuguese trading network in the Indian Ocean. Ashin Dasgupta's monograph on Surat captured the peaking of Indian maritime trade and activity in the western Indian Ocean in the latter decades of the seventeenth century and its collapse there-

after in the wake of the simultaneous decline of the Islamic empires of Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman power respectively. The new historiography questioned traditional and stereotypical assumptions about not just the marginality of Indian mercantile enterprise but about the attitude of the Indian State to merchants and their transactions. More recently we have had further innovative approaches to the study of European enterprise in India, by concentrating on personages like Vasco da Gama and the larger questions of myth building that constituted an integral part of the developing discourse on European power and presence in Asia.

Jeyaseela Stephens' work on the Portuguese in the Tamil Coast 1507-1749 would appear to fall into the second category, although he himself finds, for some inexplicable reason, Pearson's work Euro-centric! He also argues that the historiography of the Portuguese in the East especially in India developed unevenly with scholars concentrating more on the western littoral and the Arabian sea than the Bay of Bengal region, a gap that he addresses in his work on the Tamil coast, a region with a long and rich maritime tradition. Using a wide array of sources in Tamil, Portuguese and English, Stephen reconstructs the network of sea-borne commerce and overland trade of the Tamil coast and its hinterland area in the fourteenth century prior to the advent of the Portuguese. The Portuguese intervention, particularly in the capacity of private enterprise was an important catalyst in energizing and activating trade centres in the region, like San Thome, Nagapatnam and Devanampatnam. The world of the Tamil merchant comes through forcefully in Stephen's narrative, replete with details on Arab settlements in Tamil coastal towns, the flourishing trade in textiles and pearls and the growth of Hindu Chetty enterprise. What is even more significant is the keen interest that potentates in peninsular India evinced in regulating and taxing trade, in marked contrast to political attitudes in coastal Gujarat. Both the rulers of Vijayanagar and the Nayaka chieftains who replaced them resisted the Portuguese when they attempted to displace established network of commerce and pilgrimage in the south eastern littoral particularly the pearl fishery coast with important centres at Kayal and Kilkarai. The development of alternate fishery centres like Punaiykayal largely under private Portuguese enterprise and the encouragement of client communities like the Paravas who were converted to Christianity enabled the Portuguese to enjoy the cutting edge in the control of rev-



SINNERS AND SAINTS THE SUCCESSORS OF VASCO DA GAMA

EDITED BY SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM



enues from pearl fishery. The close interaction of the Portuguese with rival Muslim trading groups like the Marakhaiyars underscores the importance of the Portuguese presence in shaping segments of coastal society in peninsular India. At the same time, Stephen draws our attention to the role of the local rulers in the development of trade and commerce. The Nayaks of Gingee, Madurai and Tanjavur were directly interested in deriving revenues from commerce and closely monitored the activities of the Portuguese and their successors. It is, however, difficult to discern in their politics an explicit concern for their merchant subjects whose interests were often threatened by the Portuguese. In fact, the politics of the Tamil merchants remains elusive in Stephen's narrative notwithstanding the welter of details that are thrown up in his analysis of Portuguese commercial activities in the region.

The most impressive sections in the book relate to the ramifications of private Portuguese trade in the seventeenth century, even as the official Portuguese position was seriously dismantled by the Dutch and the English Companies and to the impact of the Portuguese presence on Tamil language and culture. The exigencies of commerce and conversions necessitated a closer acquaintance with the local languages, groups and cultures. We are told for instance that private Portuguese traders took pains to speak Tamil for the sake of conducting business transactions and that missionaries assumed responsibility for writing prayers in Tamil. The number of Portuguese loan words that made its way into Tamil testified to the vibrancy of the encounter, which went deeper than occasional commercial rivalry. With the conversion of an entire community of

Paravas, the Portuguese were in a position to negotiate with local society more intimately. Jesuits like Roberto Nobili encouraged Tamil Christians to celebrate Pongal, the Tamil harvest festival and even to wear the sacred ash on their foreheads, practices that served to reinforce emergent syncretist tendencies.

The collection of essays edited by Sanjay Subrahmanyam attempts to survey the range of European historiography on Portuguese Asia and to identify some of the more recent interventions and methodological approaches through individual essays included in the volume. While the works of C.R. Boxer and Vitoria Magalhaes Godinho studied the process of Portuguese expansion while attacking the myths revolving round it, the doyen of Portuguese studies, Luis Filipe Thomaz drew attention to the pre-history of Portuguese expansion and exploration in Asia and the changing character of its presence and participation in Asian trade in the sixteenth century. More recently, the emphasis would appear to have shifted to a biographical approach to the social history of Portuguese Asia, a project that is exemplified in the volume under review. The essays range from the tale of a Portuguese renegade in Bijapur to a Japanese convert who became a Catholic priest to a self-professed Lusitanian assassin. In the individual trajectory of the lies and pursuits of Portuguese actors in Asia is mirrored the more complex notions of diplomatic interchange, perceptions of power and of dignity in a new cultural context. Three essays stand out in the collection, the ones by Ines G. Zupanov, Maria Augusta Lima Cruz and by the editor Sanjay Subrahmanyam. In what appears an innocuously titled essay 'Notes on Portuguese relations with Vijayanagara, 1500-1565', Maria Augusta Lima Cruz comments on the complementarity of Portuguese-Vijayanagara relations, the structure of which was grounded in the Portuguese ordering of the universe. Studying a number of moments in diplomatic exchange between the Portuguese officials and the rulers of Vijayanagara, she argues that the cordiality of diplomatic interaction was possible not only because they were not in real competition or conflict but also because of an ideological construct that saw Gentiles or Hindus as potential grist for the conversion mill and the Islamic expansion was a favourable site for cordial communication. Admittedly, competing self interests cut into such received notions and it was not before the Portuguese stabilized their power in Goa and the Vijayanagara rayas looked southwards for expansion

that diplomatic interchanges assumed real meaning.

What is interesting about Cruz's essay is the roles played by individual missionaries, soldiers and merchants in the establishment and consolidation of Vijayanagar's political power and the inroads they could thereby make in situations of cultural exchange and dialogue. Thus Cristavaode Figueredo who lodged on the main streets in the inland capital with Portuguese gunners played a decisive role in the victory of Krishna Deva Raya over Ismail Adil Shah in 1520 and by his action invested an altogether new dimension to existing diplomatic relations. Of an altogether different order was the pretensions of Dom Francisco da Gama (1535-62), twice Viceroy of Goa (1597-1600, 1622-28) who intervened in Deccan politics at a time when the Mughals were stepping up their offensive against the Sultanates of Ahmednagar and Bijapur. After the 1580's Bijapur no longer constituted a threat to Portuguese enterprise. The only stumbling bloc was the Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II who was perceived as a coward in relation to the Mughals. In the Mughal camp, there was the usual discord and division between Prince Murad who had been given charge of expansion into the Deccan by Akbar and the more seasoned courtiers like Abdur Rahim Khan I Khanan. Things reached a crisis point in 1599 when, according to Abul Fazl, Murad was consumed by a sense of failure and gave in to excessive drinking and died suffering violent convulsions. The Portuguese Viceroy who was not unaware of the division in the Mughal camp claimed in a letter written on 18 December 1599 that he had with the help of occult caused Murad's death and thus taken off the Mughal pressure from the Deccan. Whether or not the Dom caused Murad's death can never be known. What is interesting as Subrahmanyam points out is the Viceroy's claims of authorship for a crime that he may not have actually committed reveals a set of moral assumptions that informed Portuguese relations with the Mughals and set the tone for their political behaviour.

In stark contrast to the self-professed villainy of the Viceroy, was the hagiography of the Portuguese missionaries turned saints, whose lives were retold and resurrected to legitimize the efforts and presence of the Jesuit missionaries in overseas provinces. The persona of Francis Xavier was a special one in this regard as Ines Zupanov points out in her essay. Making a Portuguese saint out of a Spanish missionary, she says, was a difficult feat and thus it was that a genre of Christian

A generation of scholars, Ashin Dasgupta, M.N. Pearson, Sinappah Arasaratnam, Meilink Roelofz among several others demonstrated the enduring strength and primacy of Asian/Indian maritime enterprise in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and its capacity to deflect the aggression and hostility of European competition in the Indian seas. The impression, however, quickly disappears once we recognize that the European factor is essentially deployed as a reference point to understand, reconstruct and evaluate the trading milieu of the Indian merchant and the world view of his sovereign.

histories emerged to emphasize and reinforce the progressive manifestation of Portuguese glory in Asia in the sixteenth century, the age of triumph. All the predictable attributes of sainthood like providence, clairvoyance, prophecies, miracle making prowess were carefully put together by Sebastiao Goncalves in his manuscript *Historia Religiosa da Companhia de Jesus* which became a blueprint for later histories to follow. In Zupanov's own words, the 'Historia is an excellent literary crystallization of the perception of a collective conscience. . . (it) fuelled a millenarian sensitivity which conferred an aura of legitimacy to "hagiographical" efforts in all Portuguese historical texts'. Taken together, the volume demonstrates the immense possibilities of adopting a biographical approach to social history and is a fitting tribute to earlier pioneering efforts by C.R. Boxer.

Om Prakash's study of European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India is an extensively researched work that analyses the trading operations of European corporate enterprises such as the English and Dutch East India Companies and those of the private traders and relates them to the role in the world economy or the relative scale of Asia operations in the Indian Ocean. Om Prakash comments on the pioneering role of the Europeans in breaking down technological barriers and thereby affecting a transport revolution that commenced with the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope. South

Merchants, the Port and the Ocean

Kanakalatha Mukund

POLITICS AND TRADE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD
ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF ASHIN DAS GUPTA

By Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp. viii+281, Rs. 425.00

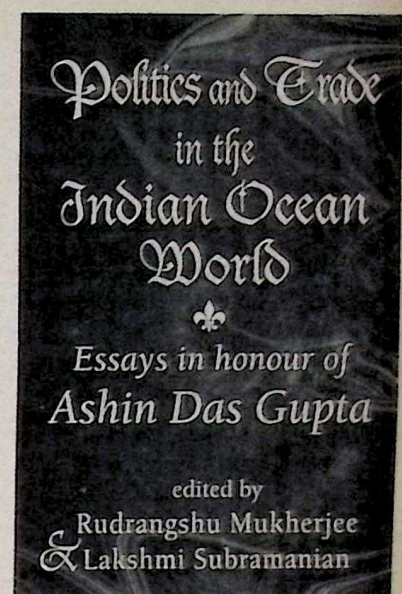
This review gives me an opportunity to express my great admiration for Ashin Das Gupta as a historian and story teller. When I first read his work, as a Ph.D. student, he brought alive for me the commercial and political world of the Surat merchants. This made such a vivid impression that I would often forget that I was reading about events which had happened more than two hundred years ago. It was also a practical lesson that one could be a scholar without sacrificing elegance of language or simplicity of style. Though I did not know him personally (I met him only once at a seminar), I can honestly say that his death has left me with a sense of personal loss.

Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian, two of Das Gupta's students, have brought out this volume of essays in his honour, essays which further explore Das Gupta's own research interests which extended to merchants, the port and the ocean. The articles look at trade and traders in various regions of India during the eighteenth century, generally understood to be a century of turmoil and transition, at inland regimes, and at Indian Ocean trade in a broader canvas, P.J. Marshall's article on Burke does not fit into this general thematic framework, but has been included as an expression of Das Gupta's own interest in Burke, and his close friendship with Marshall.

The book begins with a brief overview of all the papers and a tribute to Das Gupta by Mukherjee. The first article in the book is by Bhaswati Bhattacharya, who gives an account of the Coromandel region in the late eighteenth century. Bhattacharya's main argument is that though this was a period of great political uncertainty, this did not lead to a disruption of all trade and production throughout the region. Many production centres continued to be active, and many new market centres came up on the coast and in the hinterland so that trade networks continued to function. In the northern Coromandel after the Mughal conquest of Golkonda, the rise of local Telugu leaders and the shift in the bal-

ance of political power had disrupted the local economy and textile production. However, Bhattacharya points out, there was an economic revival in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Masulipatnam continued to be an important port in coastal trade, with extensive shipping to the ports of southern Coromandel and Bengal. The port also had an extensive trade with the hinterland and the capital city, Hyderabad. However, once again in the 1760s, the region was destabilised due to political uncertainties, and inland trade—especially the trade carried on by the *banjaras*, suffered due to the exaction of excessive customs duties. The most important pattern of trade was the overland trade in cotton which was brought to Masulipatnam to be shipped to Bengal and other regions, and the return cargo in silk from Bengal which was then transported inland. This trade particularly suffered when the coastal region came under the French and the English. However, Bhattacharya points out, an alternative route came up further up north, linking the Deccan and Bengal via Nagpur and Mirzapur, ensuring the flow of cotton to Bengal and of silk to western India. In the southern Coromandel also, many inland trade centres were subjected to frequent plunder during the Maratha invasions. Nevertheless, several new centres like Walajapet, Hindupur and Nagar became important in inland trade, in effect minimising the economic downturn experienced by the older, more traditional market towns.

While this captures the changing scenario at a particular point of time in the history of the region, I wonder whether Bhattacharya's article adds to our understanding of larger historical dynamics. Localized political turmoil and the consequent downturn in economic activity was a common feature of the landscape of pre-modern India. Artisans, merchants and agriculturists would uproot themselves and settle in a more stable region when threatened with wars, famines, unreasonable tax demands or any other disruption to their normal life. Coastal settlements would be abandoned and new ports would come up. This was particularly



true in the Coromandel region which had almost no natural harbours. Why then is this such a surprise if the same pattern was repeated in the eighteenth century?

The politics of the subjection of Indian weavers and merchants to the authority of the English East India Company in eighteenth-century Surat is studied by Lakshmi Subramanian. In various textile producing regions of India, the English effectively edged the Indian merchants out of their textile procurement, and began to make contracts directly with the weavers, thus 'bypassing the strong vertical link that existed between marketing and industrial production in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.' While this process itself was repeated in Bengal, Coromandel and Gujarat, what Subramanian stresses in this carefully structured article is that the regional variations and location-specific factors need to be understood. Subramanian looks at the organization of textile production and the underlying tensions within the weaving community on the one hand, and the gradual changes in the power structure of Surat on the other. The fact that there was a steady and even growing demand from west Asia for the textiles of Gujarat gave the merchants and weavers a greater bargaining strength against the English, and helped them to negotiate for better terms and conditions. (It may be worthwhile to remark here that this was not unique to Gujarat. In the Coromandel also, merchants and weavers were able to get higher prices from the English in the mid-eighteenth century because of the greatly increased demand for the local textiles.) The English were able to achieve the desired control over the weavers and merchants only at the beginning of the nineteenth cen-

tury, when their political power in the region also became paramount.

Ruchira Banerjee explores the resurgence of the power of the Ali Raja, the Mappila chieftain of Cannanore in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and the struggle between the Ali Rajas and the English at Tellicherry to control the trade of Malabar. The Ali Rajas of Cannanore were descended from a Nair prince of Kolattiri who converted to Islam in the eleventh to twelfth century. While Hindu Nairs looked down on trade, the Ali Rajas of Cannanore could achieve great success in trade while also retaining some of the authority of the Nair nobility. Theirs, however, was a complex and unstable sphere of influence. In the 1720s, the English at Tellicherry began to side with the Chirakkal Nairs, the most powerful faction among the Kolattiri aristocrats, and there was a long drawn-out conflict between them and the Ali Rajas. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, their fortunes again revived under Ali Raja Kunhi Amsi, who allied himself with Hyder Ali and was formally proclaimed the ruler of the Mappilas in 1766. In 1771, in order to emphasize his great power and wealth, he celebrated the wedding of his niece with great pomp, and Mappilas from all parts of Malabar paid their respects to him by attending the wedding. Sadly, this phase of dominant power was short-lived, and by 1780, their power base had become sadly eroded.

This is the story that Banerjee relates, with detailed explanations about the relationship between the Mappilas and the Ali Rajas, the nature of internal trade and overseas markets, and the European interest in the Malabar region for their requirements of pepper. Unfortunately, her narrative skills fail to match the requirements of this complex history, and the end product is often disjointed and jumpy. Names of persons (like someone she refers to as 'the Rodrigues') and events are mentioned without context or background. For instance, she first mentions the intervention by the English at Tellicherry "who pretended to act sanctimoniously" (whatever that means) and supported the Chirakkal Raja in 1722 in his conflict with the Ali Raja on p. 91, and again returns to this five pages later. Such discontinuities make for difficult reading, and the story suffers in the telling.

The longest article in the book is by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. It traces the history of Arcot from 1700 to 1732 after the region of central Coromandel came under Mughal rule, and Arcot became the capital of the Nawab. The authors argue that the first two Mughal governors/

rulers/Nawabs of the region, Daud Khan and his successor Saadatullah Khan, were keen to develop new ports on the Coromandel coast to challenge the economic power of the Europeans, and they also developed Arcot as a major centre of inland trade. They point to the role played by north Indian communities in the local economy and finances, notably the Khatris, Gujaratis and Kayasthas. Finally, they "argue that the 1730s mark a turning point... for it is now that the balance between the *nizamat* and European (English and French) political power turns unfavourable to the former, eventually leading to the widespread fiscal crisis that gripped states in Tamilnadu in the latter half of the eighteenth century."

The history of the 'Karnatak Payanghat' region from the seventeenth century is outlined carefully with details about the financial resources of the region, which give much depth to the analysis. (The authors may be unhappy that some of this careful work is undone by a misprint in the table total on p. 120). This is followed by an account of the rise of Arcot, and its formidable Nawab Saadatullah Khan. The article is remarkable for its use of sources from various languages. In spite of the observations of the authors about the use of European versus indigenous sources [see excerpt], this is the *only* piece in the entire book which uses Persian and, to a limited extent, Tamil sources, in addition to Dutch, English and French sources, which adds great depth to the piece.

The authors are also very cautious in not claiming the status of a 'stable successor state' for Arcot, but it nevertheless does seem that this is an implicit argument of the whole work. This is the point that I would like to question at some length, since this involves a question of methodology. In history, as in all social sciences, inferences and conclusions are very sensitive to the assumptions and parameters set out. Here, by stopping the chronicle in 1732, at the death of Saadatullah Khan, the authors are able to conclude, however tentatively, about the nature of the state of Arcot. Yet, even by 1736, there were complaints that the local coinage, the gold pagoda, was being debased and devalued, and in 1741, the English began to issue the 'star' pagoda, which soon became the accepted currency in the Coromandel region. Further, even during Saadatullah Khan's time, there are several references that leading persons of Arcot would send their families and money to Madras for safety whenever there was a threat of invasion or other upheaval. The 1740s marked a time of prolonged disruptions caused by the Maratha invasions, when

there was severe dislocation of economic life, and people. Thus, within ten years of the Nawab's death, the state of Arcot could neither protect the value of its currency, nor effectively provide security and safety to its subjects in the face of external threat. And, it must be pointed out, that none of these could be attributed to the pernicious influence of the Europeans. Subrahmanyam also adds some typical touches in this paper by giving his own versions of the spelling of various place names—Kadalar (Cuddalore), Sao Tome (San Thome), Naguru (Nagore)—and of the Venetian traveller Manucci (Manuzzi in the text).

Four shorter papers explore the world of Indian Ocean trade. Om Prakash clearly spells out the outlines of his study of the trade of European companies in Asia—first, to establish the centrality of India in intra-Asian as well as Euro-Asian trade, and second, to examine the political and economic environment in which Europeans functioned in different parts of Asia. For the latter, he takes up the functioning of the Dutch East India Company in the Indonesian archipelago, where they were able to exercise monopoly control over trade and spice production, and contrasts this with the situation in Japan, where the Japanese state completely controlled all foreign trade.

Kenneth McPherson and S. Arasaratnam explore more or less a common theme—trade in the Bay of Bengal. McPherson stresses the forces of continuity and change in the Bay of Bengal trade—the former exemplified by the sustained importance of *Chulia* (Tamil Muslim) and *klung* (Hindus from the Coromandel) merchants in maritime trade even after the arrival of the Portuguese, while the force of change is seen in the extensive trading activities of the Portuguese on the Coromandel coast, which has been overshadowed in historical writings by the pre-occupation with the activities of the Dutch and English companies: Portuguese merchants continued to be an important group in Madras down to the eighteenth century, and were found in great numbers all over the East coast. He also traces the changes which took place in the Bay of Bengal region after the arrival of the Dutch and English, in particular.

Arasaratnam stresses that the trade of eastern India was oriented very strongly towards the East. He concentrates more on the rise and fall of various ports in southeast Asia, and shows how, whenever political uncertainties in any port region made trading conditions difficult, maritime traders would shift to other ports. Thus when Acheh became unattractive, Tennasserim and

Johore became important, and this rise and fall of ports in the maritime trade of the region continued in a cyclical pattern. On the Coromandel coast, Masulipatnam lost ground as the major port and gave way to Madras and other ports in the southern Coromandel. In the eighteenth century, the trade of Bengal to Acheh declined sharply, while the trade to Surat and West Asia became more important. Both pieces are relatively short, and neither really takes the reader into uncharted realms. McPherson's essay which is based only on secondary works seems especially one-dimensional.

Pearson's essay on Indians in East Africa is both unusual and thought-provoking. He argues against the old assumption that because the products of India were of central importance in the trade and economy of East Africa—a fact which is well-documented—this also meant that there was a strong presence of Indians (especially Gujaratis) in the region. A further inference is that these Indians controlled local trade and finances. As Pearson points out, the available evidence just does not support this conclusion. Pearson then takes us carefully through the historical material available after the arrival of the Portuguese to outline the trade and activities of various groups from western India in East Africa. I only wish that more students would be as careful in drawing inferences from the information and data available to them. The last piece is about Edmund Burke's vision of a more benevolent and humane empire. Marshall also highlights how the perceptions about Burke changed in India as the priorities for men of affairs and scholars also changed over time.

It is always tricky to review a collection of articles, since individual contribution usually vary in quality and readability. This book is no exception to this, although it must be said that the variations across pieces is much less than is usually found in such edited volumes. I found it a little disappointing that with one or two exceptions, almost no essay has really ventured into new approaches to the dynamics of trade and politics in Indian history. On the other hand, a great deal more information has been added which strengthens our understanding of these processes in different regions in India and in Indian Ocean trade, and that is a positive contribution.

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When Clio Wore a Smile

Ashin Das Gupta (1932–1998)

Sanjay Subrahmanyam



Ashin Das Gupta, who died in Calcutta on 4 June 1998, after a protracted illness that occupied much of the 1990s, was a historian who stood alone, in more senses than one, in the firmament of Indian history. To compare Indian history to a firmament is probably a dubious idea, for it does remain even today a pool with "shallow, yet extensive waters" as Tapan Raychaudhuri once called it in the mid 1980s. Ashin was a solitary figure in an intellectual sense, for although he virtually founded a field—namely that of Indian Ocean studies between 1500 and 1800—he explored it in a way that was his own. He had a number of students at Calcutta and Santiniketan, some of whom followed his lead in studying early modern port-cities and coastal regions, but most of them steered clear of this (and surely wise) of trying to imitate their teacher. Ashin Das Gupta did not imitate his teacher, the hardworking Narendra Krishna Sinha, who was a noted historian of the eighteenth century, but a writer whom one usually reads as a chore. I read his three volumes on the economic history of Bengal as a student, and I can recall having great difficulty keeping my eyes open at the Ratan Tata Library. Not so when I read Ashin. If Indian history in the 1960s and 1970s had a stylist, it was him. Anyone who goes back and reads even the very brief piece he wrote in the manuscript for Charles Boxer (a ten-page essay entitled "Pieter Phoonsen of Surat, 1730–1740", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. XII, no. 3, 1988) will see exactly what I mean. This is a rollicking tale of a Dutch factor, who was accused of embezzlement, and whose bastard son then managed to raise a good part of the city of Surat against his father's employers, the Dutch East India Company. Between the father and the son, and sundry other characters (who between bouts of drink, discuss Manichaean questions), the reader scarcely realizes that a subtle message has been successfully communicated to him. The message is the following: whatever they claimed in their official letters, the employees of the East India Company had unofficial (and often off-the-record) dealings with one another,

as well as with Asian traders and brokers. Historians who read Company documents at their face value were making a grave error, and were also demonstrating an inability to penetrate the complex webs of sociability that eventually enabled Phoonsen to flee Surat for English protection in Bombay.

This little piece is a nice point of entry into many of Ashin Das Gupta's lasting preoccupations. From the time when he published *Malabar in Asian Trade, 1740–1800* (Cambridge, 1967), and—as he elegantly if too-modestly put it—transformed an "arid dissertation into a vulnerable book", Ashin defined what were for him the key axes around which his preoccupations as a historian would revolve. First, he decided to focus on a certain type of merchant located in a port city as the central object of his attention. This was the type of character he called the "maritime merchant", or less felicitously "the medieval maritime merchant". Maritime history was, in his view, the study of the world of the maritime merchant, and not the study of caulking, and laying keels, or biscuits and provisions. Ashin was not the sort of historian who cared about long-term series on sailor's wages, or the fine points of how sails fitted on masts. For him, as for Lewis Carroll's characters, the bowsprit got mixed up with the rudder sometimes. But that mattered little, as he did not belong to the Army and Navy Club anyway.

Malabar in Asian Trade was about the transformation in the relationship between maritime trade and politics in Kerala at the time when the Travancore kingdom was ruled by Martanda Varma and Rama Varma, and when Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan extended their reach into the south-west coast. But its focus was less on these grand political figures than on the Saraswat merchants of the port-towns, or on figures like Ezekiel Rahabi, the Cochinchinese Jewish merchant who for a time even rubbed shoulders with the princes of his time. To understand the history of the Rahabis, Ashin realized that he had to go beyond Indian history, and acquire some knowledge of the history of trans-national trading groups. In that,

he was aided by Walter Fischel, who with Shlomo Goitein was one of the leading specialists of the time on medieval Jewish trade. Later, while working on Surat and the Red Sea, he had extensive discussions with Robert Bertram Serjeant, the eccentric English specialist on the Hadramaut. To understand India, Ashin Das Gupta has written somewhere, you have to go beyond India.

This first book also defined two other tenets that he lived by. The first was that history had to have a human face, and needed to be peopled with characters rather than numbers and figures (as the economic history that was fashionable in the 1960s proposed). He often gravitated therefore to using biography, much before biography came back into fashion after its eclipse under the onslaught of the philistine disciples of E.H. Carr. The second idea, which went together with the first, was that history had to be constructed as a narrative, and once more Ashin was oblivious to the fashions that so exercised the likes of Lawrence Stone. The question nevertheless remained of what sort of narrative. Hayden White has reminded us in recent times that various modes of "emplotment" have been favoured by differing historians from the nineteenth century on. Others have analyzed the manner in which Fernand Braudel, also a maritime historian after his own manner, constructed his narratives, using flashy literary effects while claiming to eschew them, and refining a tradition that went back to Michelet in the nineteenth century. Braudel was a romantic in many respects, and he often spoke and wrote of "loving" the Mediterranean. Perhaps this was just affectation on his part, since he might have thought his image as a Frenchman imposed that sort of vocabulary of emotion on him. Ashin never spoke of loving the Indian Ocean, or even the Arabian Sea. Instead, he chose the ironic mode of emplotment, in White's rebarbative vocabulary, and raised it to a fine art. He developed it at length in the manuscript that became his most important book, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, 1700–1750*, and cast it as a pearl before the swine of the

academic book-trade. Predictably, they turned it down, and the rumours I heard in the early 1980s (which I never confirmed directly with Ashin) were that this was because he eschewed the bogus "social-scientese" of the time. His attitude was summed up when he once wrote, reviewing a book by Frank Conlon, that a working historian had to "accept his theme with its real imprecisions rather than chase an Absolute in the garb of a social scientist".

Ashin was of course no Marxist, and he had a horror of the mechanistic pretensions of some of that tribe. Of Weberians, he had a more tolerant view, as we see from his reception of Michael Pearson's *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat* (1976). But consider the following review by him of Surendra Gopal's *Commerce and Crafts in Gujarat*, a pristine product of Soviet-style Marxism:

Gujarat's trade and Gujarati crafts are important subjects for the historian, and they are important in their own rights. But I suppose not even the mature scholarship of Surendra Gopal could withstand the sub-title: "A Study in the Impact of European Expansion on Pre-capitalist Economy", which is dutifully inscribed on the front page, but fortunately fails to make the cover of the book" (*Indian Historical Review*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1976, pp. 460–61).

Those who read Ashin's *Decline of Surat* book for various academic presses seem to have rather missed the point. They apparently thought that the book was merely telling a "story" (as indeed it was), and that such stories were passé. What was one to do with a book that retailed at length the story of a Bohra magnate called Mulla Abdul Ghafur, who controlled a large part of Surat's maritime trade in about 1700? What was one to make of the manner in which Surat's decline was traced, by comparing Abdul Ghafur to his grandson Mulla Muhammad Ali, who tried to build a political constituency in the 1730s, failed miserably, and eventually died (or committed suicide) in prison? Mystified by these conundrums, academic presses allowed the manuscript to wander from

one place to another, until it found a home in 1979 with the South Asian Institute's series at Heidelberg. Since Franz Steiner Verlag from Wiesbaden (the publishers of that series), are hardly a household name in South Asia, the book remained a confidential publication, a status from which even its recent reprinting in New Delhi has not entirely rescued it. Meanwhile, readers and presses were busy lapping up what Ashin himself once called the work of "sophisticated practitioners examin(ing) the impact of whatever-it is on whatever-there-was".

In the 1980s, things changed somewhat. The Surat book was, interestingly enough, given a favourable reception at Aligarh, since Ashin seemed to have aligned himself with the angels in the Battle of the Eighteenth Century. His other methodological sins and transgressions were forgiven. Some of his propositions, on the excessive emphasis on what he called "the growth-oriented impact of European trading" seemed to have him aligned against such writers as K.N. Chaudhuri and Om Prakash. Whatever their disagreements, his relations with fellow-users of the archives of the European companies remained courteous. But Ashin was notoriously sceptical about number crunching in the European archives, an attitude that he sometimes carried from healthy scepticism to outright and outrageous affectation. Even so, he could be very amusing on the issue, as he was while reviewing Om Prakash Singh's *Surat and its Trade in the Second Half of the 17th Century*.

There is an appealing lack of pretention about Dr. Om Prakash Singh and an old-world courtesy towards witnesses, long dead, which makes one nostalgic (...). Why do we not write history like this any longer? This is a question of some importance and Dr. Singh's book, apart from its usefulness as a handy collection, may well serve as an occasion for a necessary discussion. The first reason that I know is that witnesses even in the English Factory tell lies. They do so partly because they do not know and they do not understand, and partly because they are liars. This is sad but demonstrable" (*The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XV, No. 3, 1978, pp. 415-16).

This left him in a bit of a dilemma though, since most of Ashin's work itself was based on the Dutch and the English archives. His solution was to argue, as he did frequently and with conviction, that "even if it is European documentation we read, the European

was not a particularly important person in Indian maritime trade till he began effectively to beat up the natives. Spectacular, yes. Significant in his own way, certainly. The dominating presence, no". The point then, which was carried over into the book he jointly edited with Michael Pearson, titled *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987), was that there was no "Vasco da Gama epoch" in Indian maritime history that was inaugurated in 1500. The period between 1500 and about 1750 was, for Ashin Das Gupta, a phase which was adequately defined by what he termed "Van Leur's position that Europeans adjusted to Indian and Asian tradition before they took political power".

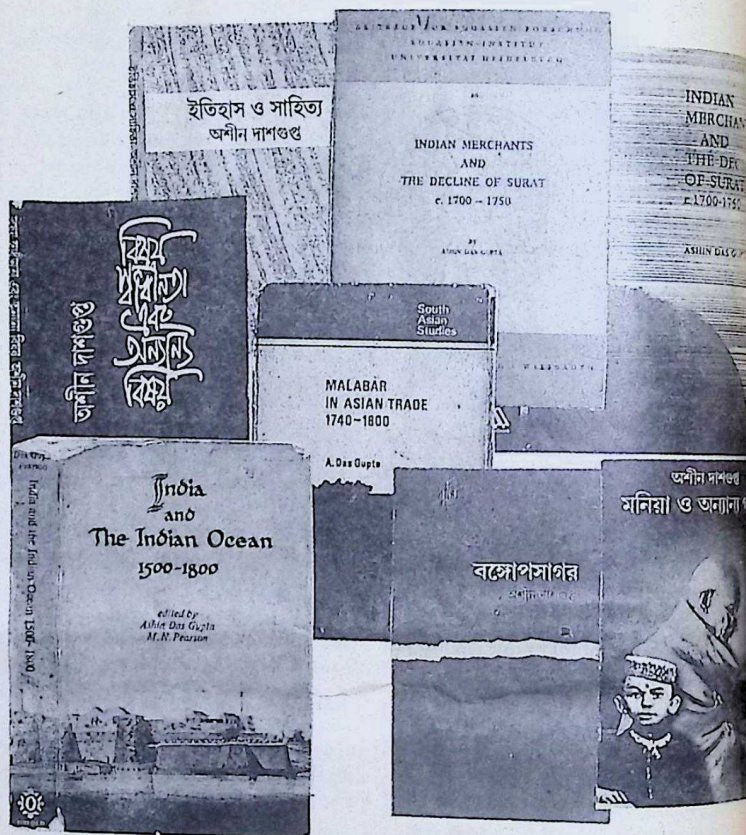
There were a number of other myths that Ashin helped demolish, including that of the Mughal state as an Oriental despotism, "monopolizing trades at the drop of a hat, fleecing merchants at breakfast, and generally carrying on as a public nuisance. . .", as he wrote in a review of Sushil Chaudhuri's first book (*IHR*, Vol. IV, no. 2, 1978, p. 510). Unfortunately, one has the impression from time to time that these are myths that persist, because so many of our colleagues do not read. At a conference in Calicut in May 1998, listeners were treated to speaker after speaker repeating shibboleths about European dominance in the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of a sort that would have made even W.H. Moreland blush. The speakers were, interestingly, not imperialists wishing to place Europeans centre-stage, but nationalists and Third World-wallahs, claiming in heart-rending tones that total European domination of the Indian Ocean began on the day Vasco da Gama set foot on Indian soil and ate his first jackfruit.

Manifestly, none of them had read Ashin Das Gupta, though some actually paid lip service to his writings. I was annoyed, but then thought of Ashin. If he had been there, and been well enough to respond, he would have opened his eyes wide in that innocent way of his, and demolished them with an ironic and well-turned phrase. Now that he is gone, those of us who followed his work are left with a task that is beyond our collective capacities, for we'll never match that lightness of touch or delicacy of expression. But we can still smile when we think of Ashin.

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History, Literature and the Individual The Bengali Writings of Ashin Das Gupta

Kunal Chakrabarti



Those who are familiar with the English writings of Ashin Das Gupta know him as one of the foremost historians of maritime trade of late medieval India. But his intellectual concerns were so rich and varied that these could not be contained within the narrow confines of trade history alone. He chose to express these in his essays written in Bengali which are almost as extensive in corpus as his English works. Since English has a far wider reach than the regional languages of India, it is tempting to present one's ideas in English, particularly for those who are equally comfortable in both English and the vernacular. Yet, from the mid-nineteenth century, Bengal developed a tradition of encouraging some of its best minds to publish at least a part of their intellectual output in Bengali. A number of major historians have consequently published a good deal of their original research in Bengali before and along with Ashin Das Gupta. However, while in most

cases the difference lies merely in the medium of expression and not in the contents, the questions that Ashin Das Gupta addressed and the manner in which he treated these in Bengali are fundamentally different from those he dealt with in English. It is impossible not to recognize the historian and stylist even in his Bengali writings—the academic precision and rigour, the compelling logic, the elegant prose and the acerbic wit are inescapable—but the themes, immediate in their significance but enduring in values, and the approach close to his heart, are different. His more personal Bengali writings complement the works of the professional historian, and the two together reveal the thinker that he was. Indeed, Dasgupta delivered two memorial lectures in Bengali on the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea (AD 1500-1800), which have since been published as pamphlets, and a monograph on the history of Indian coasts (*Upakuler Itihas*) is ready for publication. But these are

extensions of his English writings, a summing up of his life-work on India's maritime trade which he had undertaken to write in Bengali out of his commitment to the cause of education through the mother tongue. It is the same commitment which made him accept the general editorship of the open-ended history series in Bengali (*Itihās Granthamala*) that the Ananda Publishers are bringing out in volumes. I will leave these out of the present discussion and will concentrate only on those writings which are without—because they do not require—footnotes.

The first Bengali book of Ashin Dasgupta (*Itihās O Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1989) deals with the relationship between history and creative literature. He was an avid reader of literature and believed that the two subjects are closely allied in that both construct plausible narratives through reasonable speculation in their own respective ways. However, while history is circumscribed by insufficiency of available information, not all of which can be admitted as evidence, literature enjoys the freedom to indulge in unrestrained imagination. Still, his fondness for 'stories' and aversion to quantification of data are well-known, for he believed that the application of preconceived notions or statistical formulae can be reductive and would displace the multi-dimensional, contradiction-ridden human protagonists from the focal point of historical investigation. That is why, even in his more conventional writings on maritime trade, he preferred to adopt the biographical mode and arranged all his data around the activities of a few key players. His anxiety to preserve the human face of history made him, rely on literary form which, he believed, would sensitise the historian and compensate for the inadequacies intrinsic to the discipline. Given the constraints, how to conceive of and accommodate the individual within the historical narrative has been one of the prime quests of Ashin Das Gupta, and it pervades all his Bengali writings in one way or the other.

Dasgupta begins this book with his definition of history as analysis of human societies of the past based on reliable evidence. The emphasis, he says, has to be on society, for history cannot capture the life of an individual who is defined by himself. Such an individual exists, but he has no history. Only when he is located in the complex web of social networks does he become a subject of history. It is this individual, socially related and yet lonely in his privacy, that the historian ideally attempts to figure out. But he is at a loss if this individual happens to be a common man, for very little can be known about

him. On the other hand, if the individual is treated as part of a human collective, his identity tends to get submerged in a crowd. The crowd in its turn resolutely defies the attempt of the historian to locate in it the individual. This is the insuperable dilemma that the historian perpetually confronts. An imaginative and diligent researcher may discover in the police files the story of a young girl who came to Paris from her village in the 1790s and the eventually drowned in the Seine, but this event in itself does not become history till such time as it is shown that she was an accidental victim of the revolution and that this conclusion is generalisable. Thus an individual must belong to a place and time which characterise his thoughts and actions and simultaneously be a part of a larger process which transforms the insignificance of his personal life.

Some problems still remain. The thoughts of this common man are not exactly his own but a reflection of a collective mentality, at least in some ways typical of his place and time. His private thoughts, though valuable, are often unattainable and in any case unusable in history. If he is a distinguished person, history grants him his thoughts, but these are relevant only in so far as they helped to mould the thoughts of others. In other words, history concerns itself with ideas and not with emotions. The making of a genius is beyond the purview of history. For instance, history cannot explain why Gautama became the Buddha. Gautama Buddha earned his place in history not because he attained wisdom but because he ignored his personal salvation for the sake of his fellow human beings. Thus history can afford to study only the man in society. But the problem is, the same man is both social and insular at different points in time of his life. As there can be no history without the social man, there is no history of the man in isolation of his surroundings. We meet this lonely individual only in literature.

The weakness of history is also the source of its greatest strength—it is completely dependent on facts. However, the task of the historian does not end with the discovery and selection of facts. He also attempts, through judicious presentation of these facts to analyse the lives of men in society. When he arranges his facts in an orderly sequence to construct an argument he is a scientist by temperament. But since the facts at his disposal are limited and analysis of life is arduous, the historian, in empathy with his subject, takes a few liberties. In this, he is close to a litterateur. It is now universally recognized that the 'truth' of history is not unmixt. That a certain degree of

imagination is required for the reconstruction of history is also no longer denied, except that the imagination of history is qualitatively different from that of literature. History remains external to the event; the historian is a spectator. Literature plumbs the depth of life; the litterateur is a creator. Like God, he can disappear from his own creation.

When history enquires into the child-rearing practices or fear of death in past societies it actually enters the realm of literature, just as the litterateur traverses the domain of history in historical novels. Das Gupta, however, does not approve of this artificial fusion. He argues that even if a historical novel remains committed to the facts of history, it usually ends up being either fantastic or modern history merely serves the purpose of esoteric stage decoration. He mentions William Golding's *Inheritors* in which Golding has described a community of Neanderthals whose mind-set is completely unknown to the modern reader and yet appears plausible to him. Here literature tends to assume the mantle of history. But such books are rare. Similarly, Zeldin, Cobb or Ladurie may come very close to unravelling the mentality of a people and in doing so may borrow successfully the technique of a novelist, but their works will still mirror the mentality of an age, such as the bourgeois values of late nineteenth century France. The social assumptions and the intellectual environment of an age do contribute to the shaping of an individual, but a particular individual may rise above these constrictions. History can never adequately explain why two brothers come to acquire diametrically opposite personalities.

Thus, despite the affinity between literature and history, there are significant differences between the two. Das Gupta has attempted to encapsulate this complex relationship in terms of three conceptions of time in human life: a large unit of time that gives direction to society and state, such as the nationalist movement; a shorter stretch of time which structures the daily life of a particular community as exemplified in its particularistic response to a movement of much wider ramification; and a personal time of a private world invisible to the outsider, such as the thoughts of a political prisoner on the night before his execution. The primary responsibility of a historian is to recognize and analyse the changes over a period of time, and since the historian by definition is an outsider, he usually prefers to stay with the large unit of time. Of late, historians are showing a greater interest in the shorter stretch of time, but in this their problems are

compounded by two limitations inherent in the discipline of history. A large number of people committed suicide by drowning in the river Seine in the 1790s. The number of such cases went up during those years when uncertainty and repression in post-revolution Paris increased. Here, long-term trends get reflected in a short-time cycle and help the historian lay down a predictable pattern. But in certain years incidents of suicide went up even when Paris was comparatively peaceful, thus upsetting the pattern. Here the historian has no option but to plead that this was due to personal compulsions which history cannot probe. If detailed records of everyday happenings of a small village of no distinction were kept by a fastidious Inquistor, and by some happy chance those survived, it is possible for a historian to reconstruct a vivid picture of rural life in the voice of the actors themselves. This is as near as a historian can get to life in its short-time manifestation. If the records also allow a window into the nature of factional politics in the village—the jealousies, petty intrigues and illicit liaisons—the historian is offered an opportunity to describe emotions and descend into personal time. Depending on the point of view, what saves or spoils history is that the historian cannot push his stories to their logical conclusions if his store of information runs out. That is why a good many stories of the peasants and shepherds of Montailou remain incomplete. We do not get to hear what ultimately happened to Pierre Maury.

Hence, only literature can deal with personal time and do full justice to short time life-histories. This is not to suggest that the novelist cannot negotiate the large unit of time and, Das Gupta argues, for this he need not necessarily fall back on the doubtful mixed genre of historical novel. In his *Clayhanger* or *The Old Wives' Tale* Arnold Bennett has described his contemporary period and has remained throughout with his characters as a spectator. At the same time, Bennett has consciously and very effectively dealt with the three categories of time. The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century transformed the five small townships in north Staffordshire into a city. This is history in the backdrop of which the two sisters Sophia and Constance chose to pursue two different kinds of life. While Constance remained in the provincial town, Sophia ran away to Paris. When the two sisters met again in their native town, they had become old and obese; people laughed at them. They were growing old in their personal time. In the short time of their respective lives, Constance was looking after and modernizing her family business and

Sophia was running a boarding house. Enveloping these trivialities was the large time which saw the small town prosper through the introduction of railways and other amenities and the German army enter Paris. Possibly Bennett believed and wished to convey that the significance of personal and short times cannot be understood without reference to the large time. However, there are personal times that may exist in an insular void. Emma Bovary lived, sought love and died in a universal personal time where specificities of location in time and place, and therefore of history, are irrelevant. This is the undisputed domain of literature.

Das Gupta has conceded only one book the status of a successful historical novel. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy portrayed life in a large canvas in the backdrop of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. He wrote this novel to expound his conviction that history is directed not by its celebrity-heroes but by a blind irrepressible force that expresses itself through the lives of common men. If a heroic character comprehends the nature of this driving force, his initiative may bear fruit in the lives of faceless millions who are the actual but unsung heroes of history. Napoleon failed to realize this and in *War and Peace* he is an anti-hero, a mere castaway. But general Kutuzov instinctively knew the course through which the mainstream of Russian life was flowing and wisely moved along with it. He did not attempt to create history by his personal heroism, but subjected himself to the dictates of history that created itself. This philosophy of history, enumerated a century ago, may not appear altogether unacceptable to a practicing historian of today. But we also know that the Kutuzov of Tolstoy was entirely fictitious; the Kutuzov of history was a different man. Thus Tolstoy looked for the truth of history in a reformed version of history. Perhaps there is some truth in this, but the search for truth in history is different from that of literature. Only when these two truths converge do the society and the individual become co-extensive.

An individual simultaneously exists in all the three times. If he is a common man, his participation in the large time may be incidental and not easily noticed. Conversely, if he is an important person, a political leader of national stature for instance, he is more conspicuous in the large time and interacts with the common man in the intermediate zone of short time. We have already noted that the personal time of both of them is beyond the reach of history. Understandably, therefore, the historian, more often than not, is a keeper of large time. But if a historian's

subject of research happens to be not so much the events, the systems and the processes, but an individual, however important he might have been, the historian has to reckon with, even if minimally, the personal time of the individual and to an extent contend with the novelist. It is not surprising that, given his literary bent, Ashin Das Gupta chose to reflect on Gandhi, the man. The last published book of Das Gupta, *Mania O Anyanya Gandhi* (Calcutta, 1998), is a collection of essays on the evolution of Mahatma Gandhi from Mania, an outwardly undistinguished but unique child, to Bapu, the Father of the Nation, at the centre of all of which stands a terribly lonely figure.

Enquiry into a larger than life historical character, who is within the reach of living memory, is not easy. We have seen that history cannot explain why Gandhi became Gandhi. A comparison with the Buddha is germane. Gandhi internalized the value of non-violence and perfected the technique of *satyagraha* in South Africa. But this personal success did not satisfy him. He came back to initiate the Indians in the path of *satyagraha*. Das Gupta argues that faced with such an impasse the historian does not ask which personal qualities in Gandhi made him the leader of the nation but why did the nation accept him as its leader. In other words, the solution to the problem lies not in Gandhi but in the nation, for the historian, post-facto, takes it for granted that Gandhi would naturally stake his life to launch a non-violent movement for the sake of his fellowmen. If the question is turned around in this way, the broad currents of change in the national life are brought into relief and to that extent particular individuals are pushed backwards. This is what a historian is supposed to do. And yet Das Gupta undertook the immeasurably more difficult task of seeking the Gandhi in Gandhi.

This has been possible partly because Gandhi was not just any other leader, but an exceptional person, whose individuality (not to be confused with his fabled 'eccentricities' such as goat's milk or water treatment) was inescapable. Drawing on Erikson, Das Gupta has shown that from his very childhood Gandhi possessed a very strong ego which is most transparently manifest in his attempts to bring Kasturba under his control. In his relationship of service rather than of love to his parents, he always maintained a pre-meditated distance, and in this cold intervening space stored away and assiduously preserved his strong personal opinions. Gandhi was also exceptionally strong-willed. His intense desire to speak the truth and behave truthfully emanated

from his deep sense of self-respect. The British were more powerful, but Gandhi's will was stronger. His non-violence had its origin in this basic dissimilarity in their respective approaches to power. Nonviolence cannot become a force unless it is accompanied by an unrelenting will. It may sound scurrilous, but there have been few people in history as incredibly self-absorbed as Gandhi. Gandhi was convinced that he was a sinner and prone to folly. Consequently, he searched for redemption which found expression in pitiless analysis of his every thought and action. Perhaps his self-absorption pushed him into self-analysis which in turn reinforced his preoccupation with the self. Unlike Narcissus, it is not out of love for but distrust of himself that made Gandhi seek self-realization. His work, his ceaseless search for truth and God, must begin with a redefinition of the self and above all should purify him. This praxis has no place in Marxism. Marx was concerned with the external world; he believed that human beings would change only after the society was reorganized. Gandhi focussed on the mind of the individual; he knew that society would change if only human beings were transformed. Both of them offered models of an alternative society, but while Marx believed that until a non-exploitative social system was established, any attempt at reforming individuals would not only be futile but misleading. Gandhi was convinced that unless men were liberated from their elemental fears and other instinctual bondages, it would be impossible to bring about a new social order. *Satyagraha* would remould men and they would recreate the society. *Satyagraha* was Gandhi's innovation. Prompted by an inner urge, he conceived the idea, made experiments on himself, perfected its technique and offered it to his people. Understandably, Gandhi believed that he alone could conduct the programme. He considered the opinion of others on when to launch the movement, how to negotiate and when to withdraw as irrelevant. If nobody responded to his call, he would walk alone. This unique moral courage and the will to truth, this obsession with the self and uncompromising temperament, and this disproportionate emphasis on the individual made Gandhi a loner, particularly in his later years.

Gandhi failed in his endeavour to carry his people along with him till the end. Deep within himself, he was always a loner; towards the end of his life this would no longer remain concealed. In a superficial sense Gandhi became a loner because the Congress and its leaders ultimately refused to follow his

directive. They decided that the time had come to assume the reins of governance of the country and build a modern state. It would be wrong to suggest that they were in a hurry to acquire power. They sincerely believed that this decision was correct and beneficial for the country, and to achieve this Gandhi's ideals were inconsequential. Gandhi never accepted this argument, but due to his love and attachment to the institution and its leaders, he did not sufficiently assert himself. Along with Independence came partition and Gandhi became somewhat indistinct. But Independence was supposed to have been only a byproduct of his *satyagraha*. Hence, his failure should be viewed at an even more fundamental level. All his life he had worked for the friendship of the Hindus and the Muslims and fought against untouchability. He realized at the end of his career that the majority of his countrymen did not really care for either of these objectives. In the dreadful riots of the 1940s Gandhi witnessed the irreversible defeat of his cherished ideal of nonviolence. Rather, communalism took a new turn in reaction to this blood-bath and India gave birth to the Hindu voter. Gandhi was the first victim of this new communalism.

Gandhi was always inclined to walk alone, because he was committed to a truth, very nearly synonymous with his God, which he discovered and followed with his typical fixity of purpose. Yet, unlike Mother Theresa, he could not take refuge in an uncritical and selfless devotion to his truth-God, or unlike St. Augustine, with whom he shared the obsession of being a sinner, in his religious community. Gandhi was a believer, but he chose the politics of the subcontinent as his sphere of activity. His resolve to cleanse the society (often literally) of its filth and to lead his fellow-men to the path of courage and self-respect made this choice inevitable. Still, it is difficult to reconcile between the three incarnations of Gandhi—the renouncer, the visionary of an alternative way of life, and the lover of India. Only Gandhi himself could balance this difficult combination. Therefore, hermitage would have been the appropriate locus of his experiments; but he chose the nation instead. Standing amidst the ruins of all he cherished and attempted to accomplish, Gandhi saw in himself a hopelessly lonely man. He never deviated from his beliefs and worked till the last for the realization of his ideals, but the seed of his failure was buried in his praxis. Although Gandhi is worshipped once a year, he is forgotten in his own country. Yet an individual, isolated by his own convictions, may derive in-

the time of gov- build a wrong to hurry to believed and ben- achieve subsequent argument, ment to s, he did f. Along tion and indistinct. posed to ct of his ould be e mental d for the and the untouch- d of his country- either of l riots of the irre- ideal of unalism is blood- e Hindu ictim of

aspiration from the life of this failed hero. Through all the history of his evolution, his friends and adversaries, his fasts and fantasies, his ideals and contradictions, Ashin Das Gupta has attempted to comprehend the tragedy of a lonely man. The most complex, voluminous and also the most difficult to review among all his Bengali books is a collection of essays on a variety of themes ranging from freedom, tolerance and rationality to Jawaharlal, Azad and the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, titled *Bishay Sandhinata O Anyanya Bishay* (Calcutta, 1992). These essays, written over a period of twenty-five years in response to the present confusion regarding the past or the future, reflect in some way his interest in literature, historical method and the problem of the individual. Despite, this underlying similarity in approach, it is impossible to summarise the arguments of even some of the representative essays. The topics are diverse and space is limited. However, in the preface, Das Gupta has stated that the essays are arranged thematically, rather than in a chronological order. This confirms my impression that the last essay called "*Robi Thakurer Dal*" (Tagore's Followers) in a way sums up his position on the role of the individual in society.

In his last novel *Shesher Kabita*, written in his seventies, Tagore created a character called Nibaran Chakrabarti, a poet of the post-Tagore generation, who disapproved of Tagore. Tagore's poems were bloodless; they lacked vigour. Amit Ray, the hero of the novel, favoured Nibaran Chakrabarti and disapproved Labanya, his friend, who still admired Tagore. Amit was smart and articulate; his criticism of Tagore was therefore sharp and dismissive. Labanya could not match Amit in verbal skill, but her judgement was sound and she continued to gently defend Tagore. It is not known whether this defense ever reached Nibaran Chakrabarti, but at the end this poet of the future seems to have found a place among Tagore's followers themselves. It is reassuring to believe that these followers of Tagore still exist. They are spread out among the countless quiet and gentle Bengalis. For, it is a tradition, a way of life. However, this quiet life contains within it a tremendous resilience which does not advertise itself, but imperceptibly preserves the enduring values and thus paves the way for a better future. It is the duty of every human being to strengthen and enhance this quiet life. Tagore had done precisely that. It is important to remember that Tagore was different from his followers in a number of ways. His depth of perception and courage of conviction

are not expected of everybody. In his novel *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World) Tagore attributed to Nikhilesh the qualities he himself possessed and held dear, and to Sandip the ones he despised. Sandip is sensual and drifts with the current. The power of those who can usurp—often in the name of a cause—what legitimately belongs to others is universally recognized. The strength of Nikhilesh is in his renunciation and restraint. He cannot whip up enough excitement within him to act impetuously like a fanatic, even for the service of the nation. When an upsurge sweeps across the nation, he stands up to his conviction, and if necessary, sails against the tide. His innate patience allows him the distance to review every situation and his natural civility stops him from being coercive even in a crisis. Hence, his commitment to what is good and just is not easily noticed; his composure is misjudged as timidity and indecision even by his wife: Tagore, in his irritation, banished Sandip from the scene of action and sent Nikhilesh to die in doing what Nikhilesh believed to be his duty. The Sandips may disappear, but the damage they cause persists. At the end of the novel Sandip fled, but the communal tension he triggered off remained. The struggle of Nikhilesh is against this evil and concomitant suffering and the struggle must continue with the help of those who think alike. That is why it is essential to recognise the importance of Tagore's followers.

The determination of Nikhilesh is hard to come by. But there is no dearth of people who would see in him a reflection of their own ideal. It is regrettable if one cannot pursue one's ideal in life, but it is a disaster if ideal is not considered worthy of emulation. Those who acknowledge ideal as ideal are Tagore's followers; they are not with Sandip. Nikhilesh possessed a rare courage; not all of Tagore's followers can have it. But they have the good sense to recognise courage as a desirable quality and the discretion not to inflate the rank of those who ridicule this courage as imprudence. This is sufficient. If this realisation leads one to positive action, we should be in a position to appreciate his fortitude and proclaim that he is one of us.

When the choice is between coarse sensuality and aesthetic renunciation, the followers of Tagore can easily decide. Problem arises when two kinds of renunciation clash with each other, when Tagore confronts Gandhi. If it is simply a matter of renunciation, Gandhi has no parallel. But what do the followers of Tagore do if the followers of Gandhi in a state of emotional frenzy, act in a manner that hurts dispassion-

ate Nikhilesh's sense of probity? They would still favour Nikhilesh, for he was not against renunciation but stood for it. Nikhilesh was against unrestrained action and frenzy that clouds judgement. Gandhi never approved of unrestrained action either. But he saw a nation lacking in self confidence and in the grip of a pervasive fear. He attempted to instill courage in his people by initiating them into the practice of nonviolence. The possibility that this new-found courage might occasionally express itself in frenzied behaviour did not upset Gandhi. He believed that nonviolence would eventually discipline such excesses. This belief proved baseless, but Gandhi himself always acted on it. At the same time, he never ignored Tagore's word of caution. Gandhi regarded Tagore as the conscience of the nation.

The essay ends with a rare declaration of faith:

"Great people have strong beliefs. Here, Robi Thakur is different from his followers. Belief remains scattered in society; the courage of conviction of every human being is his own. The seers of truth survive—if not in the conduct of the nation, at least in its beliefs. Even if we have not imbibed Gandhi or Tagore in our daily lives, we remember them in distress. The followers of Tagore are spread out in the minds of the people. They will never open shop and thrive. That is a relief. It is unlikely that they will ever do anything much. That is disappointing. But these people know Robi Thakur. The poet has taught them how to distinguish between right and wrong. It seems that somewhere a suitable reply (to evil) is taking shape in the minds of the people. That is my belief.

All times are difficult; some are more difficult than others. In these troubled days, when the present is in disarray and the future holds no promise, it is necessary to declare one's faith in humanity as an oath, as Tagore did in his essay *Sabhyatar Sankat* (Crisis of Civilization), written on his eighteenth birthday during the height of the Second World War. In the premature demise of Ashin Das Gupta we have lost a very distinguished follower of Tagore. It is an irreparable loss not only to the intellectual community, but to all right-thinking people.

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Putting Politics in Command

Nasir Tyabji

IMPERIAL POWER AND POPULAR POLITICS: CLASS, RESISTANCE
AND THE STATE IN INDIA, C.1850-1950

By Rajnarayan Chandavarkar.

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. xii + 388, Rs. 595.00

It is a sign of the era we live in that the "powerful[ly] revisionist" analysis, that the blurb of Rajnarayan Chandavarkar's book tells us is in store for us, is a revisionism that brings politics to the forefront. What is backgrounded is culture, or rather, explanations of behaviour and attitudes which have a cultural base. Here, a word of explanation may be in order for those readers of *The Book Review* who might wonder what else but politics could be the centrepiece of a book whose keywords are, surely, "power", "resistance" and "state".

Culture seems to have made a role for itself in Indian studies of history on the basis of the argument that resistance to colonial rule did not express itself solely with reference to political forms of struggle against the colonial state: resistance was much more widespread in everyday struggles against the imposition of colonial hegemony which took the form of a cultural onslaught. This included science, medicine, and other forms of "western" knowledge, i.e. where the epistemological base had in the immediate past been developed

in the occident. Culture as an explanatory factor was then extended into areas where the peasantry and working classes were active and here, too, the forms of struggle were shown to have been moulded by the specific cultural milieu in which the protagonists lived, and by their culturally determined view of the issues at stake.

Chandavarkar disagrees with this approach, and would deny the methodological gap that advocates of *culturist* explanations would claim had been left by an earlier generation of studies of Indian colonial history, mostly Marxist in orientation. These earlier studies, usually seeking a political or economic version of causal events, were said to leave gaps in our understanding of the full range of phenomena that both colonialism and anti-colonial struggles encompassed.

In his introductory essay (the book is a collection of essays) Chandavarkar agrees that a gap was left by the earlier generation of history writing. But this, he holds, was not due to the lack of consideration of the cultural factor. It was due to the shared perspective of both functionalist and Marxist writers of a view that societies (or their components, such as the working class) had a broadly predetermined evolution (the teleological view). When neither Indian society, nor the Indian working class moved towards modernity or a socialist revolutionary movement, respectively, analysts began asking why. What they did not do is what Chandavarkar both advocates and gives empirical examples of: a political analysis of what they (the Indians) actually did do. In other words, the book is a plea against analysis of why certain things were not done, or not achieved, and an emphatic plea against cultural explanations of what was done. Thus (on the one hand)

We will also have to pursue the hypothesis that the terrain upon which the working class, perhaps any working class, fought its battles was determined by its opponents and therefore, their forms of action re-

flected not their level of consciousness, but the range of options available to them inside a particular economic and political conjuncture (p. 75).

On the other:

The development of trade unions was largely conditioned by, perhaps dependent upon, the willingness of employers and the state to tolerate them. It neither signified the development of a particular stage of class consciousness nor did it anticipate the rise of socialism (p. 99).

This could, of course, be merely *fin de siècle* empiricism. However, in three essays dealing with general issues of the working class and the colonial state, Chandavarkar puts forward an interesting approach (not quite yet a perspective) towards the problem of explaining working class behaviour generally, and its battles with employers and the colonial state when this behaviour took on a more contestatory character. A number of threads of reasoning constitute this approach. The first is the notion of crime that the colonial state (the police, in particular) imbibed as it consolidated its control during the 19th century: this notion encompassed specifically defined offences, such as dacoity and riots in particular, but even more problematically, the unstable and arbitrary nature of protest. Organized industrial action was then viewed as tantamount to a riot-in-the-making. The second thread was that of assumptions about colonial society and its cultural peculiarities (p. 229). The third thread was the extension of these cultural peculiarities to the working class and its actions (p. 93, p. 229).

However, the situation was not static. As one of the essays shows, as the degree of organizational unity of workers under communist leadership increased, "... the state intervened less through the office of the police commissioner and increasingly from Government House" (p. 136). Thus, while the police (and the millowners) may not have recognized the distinction between industrial action, and a riot, the shift in the institutional locus of handling industrial relations was an important indication of the state's recognition of this distinction.

Two of the essays deal with themes distinct to that of the relationship between the working class and the state. The first of these argues for an alternative perspective on Indian industrialization. In such a perspective, technology is not to be viewed as a neutral force whose diffusion leads inexorably to the growth of large scale industry. It

is actually a site for contestation between workers and management, and thus the labour movement has a discernible impact on the pattern of industrial development. Reinterpretation of Bombay's industrial development through such a perspective results in an interesting story. To this account, a corresponding process could be added through this contestation not only is the concrete nature of the technical and organizational supervision of the work process defined, but so are the contending classes themselves. Both industrialists and workers, as social classes, change in their mutual interrelationship. The making of the working class is thus also the making of the industrialists. The historical fact, that actually, the industrialists showed little signs of change (they had no need to) would have fitted well with Chandavarkar's characterization of the colonial state.

Colonialism in India might... be defined ... as the process by which labour was cheapened and more fully subordinated to capital, both indigenous and imperial ((p. 179).

The clearest example of a situation in which the state's preconception of the nature of crime and violence and Indian collectivity could indulge in was provided by events in Bombay in 1928-29. Although the 1928 general strike in the textile industry had been accompanied by very little violence, the communal disturbances of early 1929 had created a widespread perception that the authorities were not in control of the situation. As Chandavarkar shows, even left wing nationalist newspapers, such as the *Bombay Chronicle*, advocated the adoption of potentially repressive legislation by the Government. It was because of these publicly expressed opinions that the Government was able to go on the offensive against the Girni Kamgar Union, whose organizational base among the Bombay millworkers was severely attacked. A potential collective challenge to the managerial mindset of the Bombay millowners was thus never permitted to come to fruition.

It is here that Chandavarkar's reading of the source material might be questioned. There is surely a difference between teleology and dialectics! In 1928, different sections of workers, from distinct caste backgrounds, and different departments of the mills, came together to form mill committees which were sufficiently cohesive for them to become the main bone of contention between millowners and the union. This experience must have changed workers' attitudes, both on the shop floor, and in the mill districts, and introduced new

Politics of Identity

G.P. Sharma

MEMORY, IDENTITY, POWER: POLITICS IN THE JUNGLE MAHALS 1890-1950

By Ranabir Samaddar

Orient Longman, Chennai, 1998, pp. 295, Rs. 250.00

The book under review is an important contribution to the study of historical anthropology which still remains a much less developed area of research in Indian academia. Normally, historians and anthropologists, here, do not tread on each other's path and quite often history stops short of anthropology and vice versa thus perpetuating the age old divide between the two.

Set in the ecological surroundings of the jungle mahals (West Bengal), the book under review seeks to explore the different ways in which the local society of Jambani Mahal comprising both tribals and non-tribals, responded to challenges posed by the colonial rule. In trying to understand the intricacies and complexities of changing social cultural and material milieu, the author looks for the reasons behind subaltern militancy. How did an agrarian society based on interdependence of communitarian interests and having common cultural expressions begin disintegrating into mutually hostile social groups under the impact of colonial rule? How did the boundary of community begin redefining itself to allow for new forms of solidarities which were primarily mediated through caste, and new forms of protests which were marked by aggression?

The book opens with a detailed discussion about the sources used. The author has drawn upon a variety of local sources ranging from village notebooks on crime and local affairs, district records to textual narratives of immense value to scholars doing research on localities. One advantage that accrues to the author for using such wide-ranging sources is that he is able to crosscheck one set of information with another which lends greater objectivity to the work.

The second chapter contains an interesting geneological account of the Raja of Jambani and his feudatories based on the textual narratives of two important figures in the history of the mahal, Kashinath Dhal and Sambhunath Sarangi. While the first

was an estate official belonging to the kshatriya caste, the second was a brahmin and a priest attached to the royal household. They were basically "cultural chroniclers" who describe the manner in which the cultural ascendancy of the Jambani rulers took place. How did it usher in a new cultural regime by subsuming the local culture? Both are concerned in their own ways in projecting the best possible image of their castes and in doing so their accounts at times turn fictive. But this is not to deny the fact that both display a remarkable sense of history and were conscious historians. Kashinath in trying to trace the history of the Jambani raj makes a strong plea for its sanskritized heritage and puts forward a claim for its "high origin". He even goes a step further and equates the ritual position of the kshatriyas, the caste to which the rulers, with that of the brahmins just to show that while they were superior to the latter in all other respects, they were equal and not inferior even in this respect as well. Once the exalted position of the raja is established then the focus shifts toward the prajas and once again praise is lavished on the former for being benign and charitable toward the latter and the raja's rule being characterized by "serene homogeneity and tranquility". The author however points out that this is more of fiction than fact because Hunter's Statistical Account tells us otherwise. It shows that the operation of the Act X of Bengal Tenancy Act of 1859 led to increasing tension between the landlords and their tenants due to the issues of rent enhancement and eviction.

The other account by Sambhunath Sarangi also highlights the process of sanskritization and the pride of place occupied by the brahmins in it. However, the focus shifts from the zamindar family to 'the mutual closeness of the priest and the warrior, the brahmin and the raja.' As torchbearers of the Hindu tradition, their indispensability to the royalty is stressed and it is said that the brahmin's blessings ensures

the growth of the family tree of the raja. The role of brahmin is also underlined in civilizing the ruler who offers human sacrifices on each amavasya day to please the local goddess Rankini Devi. It is, however, with the intervention of the brahmin priest that this savage practice is brought to an end and further, the pargana as a whole is civilized with the "combined help of the ruler and the priest". One therefore, finds in this account, the convergence of two processes, one of sanskritization and the other of political ascendancy of the Jambani rulers, with the brahmin and the kshatriya complimenting each other's role. While the former as the facilitator of the process of Hinduisation provides legitimacy and religious sanctity to the exercise of political authority by the raja, the latter, in return, lends respectability to the former by granting exercise of political authority by the raja, the latter, in return, lends respectability to the former by granting him the privilege of being closely associated with the royal household and by patronizing him with rent free land grants.

With the new structure of power, buttressed further by colonial rule, emerged the politics of identity which is the focus of discussion in chapter three. Even as the beneficiaries of colonial rule began to consolidate their position, those who had been left behind or had lost out began to feel insecure. This sense of insecurity derived mainly from three factors—one the extreme charitable disposition of the raja toward the brahmins leading to large scale rent free land grants, two the land survey and settlement operations of 1912 and three the commercialization of forest products. The author argues that during the settlement operations the brahmins managed to record more land under their possession than what had been originally granted to them by the zamindars. As a result the pressure of land revenue began mounting on him. Earlier the Bengal Tenancy Acts of 1859 and that of 1885 had already strengthened the tendency toward rent enhancement because of the fear of large chunks of land going out of zamindar's control. Thus the raja's primary concern was to bridge the gap between rent and revenue. Another development which undermined the subsistence economy of this jungle mahal was the unabated commercialization of the forest and a process of deforestation leading to the breakdown of the moral order. All this, along with the famine of 1876, unleashed a process of differentiation in landed property weakening the community ties and paving the way for rural protests.

With the beginning of unrest, the

system of village headmanship also came under strain. The mandal, as the village headman was called, refused to shoulder the burden of collecting rent because it was not worth the trouble and risk attending this perilous task. As the crisis deepened with large incidence of landlessness the mandals also began opposing the zamindars and assumed the leadership of the movement. A large number of cases of deposition cited by the author provide graphic details of the tales of miseries and woes of the peasants. What added to their miseries further was the intra-family dispute within the zamindari family. The tenants of one zamindar were harassed by another. In the ensuing breakdown of law and order and the peasant's submission to the new courts of law one finds frequent references to the notions of 'lost prosperity' and 'current misery'.

While referring to the politics of mass mobilization the author finds that the penetration of the Congress in the region was facilitated because of two reasons; one the social reform movement based on the lines of sanskritization amongst the tribals and two, the raja's professed loyalty to the British as is evident from his commitment to help the latter in its war efforts. However, he feels that the entry of Congress had nothing to do with the popular upsurge and that it was a mere coincidence. In claiming autonomy for the peasant unrest he criticises Sumit Sarkar who, according to him, views the unrest in the light of swadeshi politics and finds a kind of linkage between the two. Certain points need to be clarified here. One, the term linkage does not necessarily mean an organic link and two, the national politics of mass mobilization and the anti-zamindari movement did converge in some regions at least for some time. We must bear these facts in mind while discussing the relationship between the elitist and popular movements. The kind of linkage suggested by Sumit Sarkar is only symbolic in nature. A much better exposition of Sarkar's argument can be found in Shahid Amin's work on Chauri Chaura where Gandhi is conceived differently in popular imagination.

While popular memory has survived through textual and oral tradition, the official documents provide the basis for administrative memory. The official perceptions about local society varied according to their real life experiences. Most officials, from the district magistrate down to the daroga, were quite conscious of the existing reality but were constrained to work within the framework of imperial policy. It is quite surprising that the widely held

notion about official perceptions being mainly influenced by the colonial discourse is not true. In fact the daroga was able to make a distinction between a "bad" and a "good" tribal according to the prevalent elitist notion of the two terms but he was not quite happy about making a blanket use of the term "Criminal Tribes" while addressing the tribals. The village crime notebooks, written by the darogas, point to the agrarian origin of disturbances in Jambani and hold the manager and the assistant manager of the estate responsible for it. This shows that the daroga had an understanding of the problems of the peasants although the inner dynamics of the rural society, revolving around the issues of social and economic mobility in the colonial context, was beyond their comprehension. He was also well aware of the caste distinctions but could not help removing the official bias along caste lines because he received clear instructions to report events in the light of the activities of each caste. Finally, the author turns from land politics and the politics of identity to politics of culture. Here he counters certain common notions about human consciousness and rightly points out that popular consciousness had its own rationale and any act or acts considered irrational by the outside world had a valid reason and meaning within the realm of popular culture. The local cultural tradition of Jambani became the medium through which the zamindars expressed their power and the peasants their collective identity. The former not only patronized local festivals and rites but also lent an alien flavour to it. One important change that we notice was in the performance of Jhumur, a very well known tribal rite of collective enjoyment. Jhumur singing under their patronage acquired a professional touch and became exclusive. From collective performance it also became an individual act with emphasis being more on the dance rather than song form. It appears that despite such efforts to dominate the local culture some aspects of it did retain their pure form. The problem of retention of cultural autonomy, however, needs to be seen in the light of the process of Hinduisation that had also gripped the tribal peasants. Keeping this in view it is not possible either to sustain the idea of autonomous culture or that of a common culture. It would be interesting to know in this context the impact of weakening community ties on the common cultural experiences.

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Hari Sen

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By P. Hardy

Cambridge University Press, 1998, Cambridge, pp. xix+306, (incl. maps), Rs. 150.00

THE ECONOMY OF MODERN INDIA, 1860-1970

By B.R. Tomlinson

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. xix+235, (incl. maps, figures, graphs and tables), Rs. 150.00

These four volumes are paperback Indian editions published this year by Foundation Books, New Delhi, of books that are well-known to scholars of Indian history. Hardy's monograph was published in 1972 in the Cambridge South Asian Studies series, and the other three were published in this decade as a part of the New Cambridge History of India.

Forbes' book is an excellent introduction to the history of Indian women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a wide-ranging and accessible interpretive survey of the historical processes and events in that period, and of the monographs on the subject. Its lucid style and the author's self-consciousness in dealing with the source materials encourages the reader to question the orthodoxies and conventional wisdom of modern Indian history. The book also has a very good bibliographic essay which is very useful for those who wish to explore specific themes in women's history in modern India.

Gordon's book on the Marathas does not have a bibliography, but it does have an introduction which is primarily a discussion of the sources and the historical literature on the Marathas in Marathi and English. The book is an interesting examination of the political and diplomatic history of the Marathas

in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The discussion of political history is enriched by narratives of the careers of those who controlled a variety of resources in the rapidly changing apparatus of power among the Marathas. Andre Wink's *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986) is perhaps a more complex and sophisticated discussion of the roots and texture of Maratha control, but Gordon too has some meaningful insights into the way in which the Maratha regimes centralized the gathering of information on the districts that they controlled, into the historical importance of the migrations that accompanied the expansion of Maratha influence, and the abiding significance of the traditions of heroism spawned by the growth of Maratha power.

The twenty-six years since Hardy's *The Muslims of British India* was first published have not reduced the value of the book as an informative and well-written survey of the history of sub-continental Muslims in the colonial period. Its style may seem dated to readers with a taste for post-modern gloss, but Hardy's ability to weave critical judgements into a lucid narrative makes the book accessible and stimulating for students in particular.

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The volume has an annotated bibliography which was very valuable in the 1970s, but the large number of monographs on the social and political histories of Indian Muslims in the colonial period published since then have made it somewhat obsolete now. These monographs have greatly enriched the discussion of those histories, but none of them has challenged Hardy's position as the author of the best available introductory survey of the subject. However, without denying the merits of the book, I must point out that the anodyne detachment of the last chapter, entitled 'The two partitions: of British India and of the Muslim community', still leaves me with a sense of disquiet.

Tomlinson's *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970* is a good introductory text for the last century of the colonial period. It has the added advantage of covering the first two decades of the republican period, and this enables the author to survey the principal macro-economic trends in early-independent India. The book is a clear and perceptive overview which interprets the specialized literature meaningfully. Read together with Vol. II of *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, edited by Dharmu Kumar (Cambridge, 1982), it provides a point of entry into a discussion of modern India's economic history. Tomlinson's perspective offers a valuable corrective to the nationalist rhetoric on colonial economic history that has become axiomatic in the minds of many students, and the book has an excellent bibliographical essay which encourages and assists further reading. There is a rich fund of arguments, insights, interpretations and information in these books and students of Indian history owe a debt of gratitude

to the publishers for their reasonable prices. However, it is a pity that the volumes are poorly produced. There are a number of typographical errors in each of them and all of them have pages where the inking is so uneven that sections of the text have become illegible. Hardy's book has pages where the text is obscured by lacerations on the paper, and in my copy of Forbes' volume pp. 265-288 are not attached to the spine. The edition of Hardy's *Muslims of British India* is described as the "First Corrected South Asian Edition 1998" by the publishers, but the corrections have been made rather whimsically, and some errors in the original text have been reproduced in the current edition. For instance, Hardy rendered the name of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (the founder of the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya) incorrectly as Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly. This has been repeated in the current edition, which seems in fact to be a facsimile reproduction of the original, with a few exceptions. The death of Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana in 1975, three years after the original text was published, has led to a very shabby and misaligned insertion of the year of his death on p. 234 of the current edition. The publishers chose to make room for the four additional digits by reducing the size of the typeface and changing the style and alignment of the digits in the single line in which the insertion was made. Like Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, Louis Mountbatten also died between 1972, the year when Hardy's book was first published, and 1998, the year of the current edition. But the publishers have decided to ignore Mountbatten's assassination and have reproduced the original "... Lord Louis Mountbatten (1990) ..." on p. 250; perhaps because they were alarmed by the results of their labours on p. 234. "Corrections" like the one on p. 234 seem needlessly clumsy because if there was some difficulty in making them properly in the main body of the text, they could have been made in the index. In the 1972 edition of Hardy's book, there was a note at the head of the index which stated that "some life dates which would have been difficult to insert into the text in the proof stage have been included in the index." This note has been reproduced in the 1998 edition, but the facility it provided has been neglected.

In times when inflation has made the purchase of books a rare indulgence for students and teachers in colleges and universities, it is indeed unfortunate that these valuable and inexpensive volumes are not better produced.

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Aspects of the Freedom Struggle

A.K. Damodaran

THE MAKING OF A NATION : INDIA'S ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

By B.R. Nanda

Harper Collins Publishers, India, 1998, pp.362, Rs.500.00

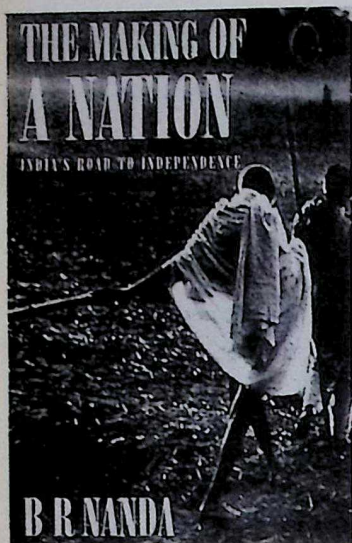
The 50th anniversary of the country's achievement of Independence has led to many retrospective investigations into the emergence of India as a nation state in the middle of the twentieth century. There has been a great deal of smug, even unctuous self-glorification. Negative reactions have also been there emphasising the loss of the original optimism and self-respect as a society down the decades. Both approaches are essential if one were to see this period of transition half a century after Independence and three years before the end of the millennium, according to the western Judae-Christian or Greek-Roman chronological conventions accepted by all the cultures of the world today. It is possible to exaggerate these contrary aspects but they are useful because they have become a part of the consciousness of the ordinary educated Indian as much as it is of an American, Russian or a Chinese today. B.R. Nanda's book is an important contribution to the literature on modern Indian history, more particularly the evolution of the National Movement from the "mutiny" in 1857 to the transfer of Power in a strictly constitutional manner by the British Government to the Indian people and their elected representatives in 1947. Nanda is one of the leading scholars on the Indian National Movement. His biographies of Gandhi, the Nehrus and, perhaps, most important of all, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, have helped the modern Indian student of history to understand the major developments in the evolution of Indian nationalism.

The Making of a Nation is, in fact, a new book consisting of old writings, a collection of several extracts from earlier studies of aspects of the freedom struggle. However, it is not a mere compilation of material already available.

They have been carefully selected and put together by the author in a chronologically sequential fashion connected by newly written prefaces to all chapters which achieve the intended effect of a new organic unity and a fresh contemporaneity of even familiar assessments. In doing so the author has carefully incorporated in his analysis most recent studies of the Indian freedom movement including the Subal-

tern Studies and the Cambridge School's insistence on the British contribution to the Indian achievement. All this is done in the detached and sober style to which we have become accustomed in his earlier writings.

The book traverses 90 years of domestic Indian politics from the first war of independence to the actual achievement of a very distant goal. Throughout the narration there is a continuing sensitivity to the emergence, the creation, the invention, if you want to be a post-modernist or a pessimist, of the Indian nation. This idea is put forward carefully in the introduction which along with the last two chapters, "Reflections on the Indian Revolutions", and "Nehru and Nation Building" gives the idea of India being a nation in the post-Enlightenment sense was always there in the mind of the political elite. Most of the leaders of the Indian National Congress were conscious of a certain homogeneity, cultural solidarity and a distinctive geographical identity. They were all conscious of the contribution of Britain and its administrative arrangements to India's nationhood. As Nanda notes, "Sarojini Naidu, the poetess, when asked by Halide Edib, the Turkish writer, who visited India in 1930s, as to what the British would leave behind when they left India, replied at once: 'A Nation'." There is a consciousness of this national identity in most of the earlier leaders like Pherozeshah Mehta, Ranade, Tilak, Gokhale and Surendra Nath Banerjee. By the time the Indian National Congress was founded by an Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume, in 1885 there was also a consciousness of a unique civilization which preceded the British occupation. Here there were grey areas. There was an absence of discussion of the role of Muslims in Indian society even though these decades witnessed the great achievements of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in reviving the self-confidence of the Indian Muslim middle class. The Congress had its own Muslim stalwarts like Badruddin Tyabji and the future problems which came with the Partition of Bengal in 1906 were still far away but Nanda never overlooks the incipient complexities of the Hindu-Muslim-British relationship troubled as it was by recent history



and present challenges.

It is important to be very clear about the word 'Nation'. In Europe, the 19th century witnessed the unification of Germany and Italy. After the First World War came President Wilson's ideology of self-determination which led to the establishment of several nation states, some homogeneous and some multinational out of the two dead Empires, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian. Today we know that these brief experiments were not all successful. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia have split, one in bloody strife and the other in a civilized arrangement in the last decade. The period after the First World also witnessed the formation of the Soviet Union with many "nationalities" as distinct from "Nations". During the thirties most of us, university students, thought that Stalin's thesis on nationalities was the last word on the subject. Compared with these European developments we have the evolution of the U.S. as the "first universal civilization" with impeccable credentials to be the sole superpower. It is in relation to these global developments that we have to assess the magnitude of India's achievement in shaping a nation state. In Stockholm I was told by a Swedish scholar that India was "Europe made effective". A pleasant enough compliment. This feeling of nationalism was an intoxicating experience during the years before Independence when Gandhi dominated the scene. The experience is summed up by Nanda thus: "Those of us who have lived through the earlier years of Independence would recall, despite The Trauma of the Partition—the buoyant feeling of what Nehru picturesquely described as the realization of India's Tryst with Destiny. The incubus of foreign role had at last been lifted and new vistas of progress have

opened. Here, as always, Nanda is objective and scrupulously fair: "One must acknowledge that the optimism of those earlier years has been somewhat diluted". There is no self-flagellation, only wistful introspection.

The 90 years covered in the book are not evenly distributed between decades. The first six chapters deal with the story of the Indian National Movement till 1919 when Gandhi who had been on the "periphery" walked into the center of the stage. Nothing is left out in these hundred pages. It is a comprehensive history of the National Movement from the foundation of the Indian National Congress onwards. All the major events are discussed—the partition of Bengal, the moderate extremist confrontation, the Lucknow Pact, and the Home Rule Movement of Dr. Annie Besant. Eleven chapters deal with the first two phases of the Gandhian revolution in all their various aspects. The author very carefully brings out the technique of revolution and retreat into non-political activities like the constructive programme which Gandhi practised during the three great movements of his leadership of the Freedom Struggle. In doing so all the details are described—Chauri Chaura, the Lahore Congress decision to fight for complete independence, the Round Table conferences, the experiment with limited federalism and the acceptance of office. This period is also notable for the emergence of a group of major leaders round Gandhi among whom Nehru was the chosen heir apparent. There is also a careful investigation of the Gandhi-Bose equation. These chapters bring out the central argument in the book that Gandhi made all the difference to the Indian National Movement and that all the other important leaders had to reconcile themselves to this reality, with one exception. Mohammed Ali Jinnah defied all the dismissive assessments of his position in Indian politics, particularly as shown in the 1937 Elections, and came out with the Pakistan Resolution in 1940. The troubled relationship between Gandhi and Jinnah is seen against the earlier comfortable personal ties the Mahatma had with Muslim leaders in South Africa and in the Khilafat Movement. Nanda refuses to accept the fashionable assessment in recent writings that Nehru personally was responsible for the revival of the Muslim separatism after the Congress refusal to form a coalition with the Muslim League in U.P. It is, of course, one of the "might-have-beens" of the freedom struggle. But if there was an error, the whole Congress leadership, including Gandhi himself, Azad, Kidwai and Nehru, were responsible.

The dramatic decade of the forties is discussed in one single chapter. The Quit India Movement, the I.N.A. Trials, the Change of Guard in London, the Cabinet Mission and the final tragic drama of Independence with the partition and the massacres in both the successor states are dealt with in a brief terse fashion. Here the author seems to have made a deliberate decision to reverse the usual laws of historical perspective and devote to the earlier decades detailed attention while projecting the last dramatic years in the foreground in a synoptic fashion. My personal feeling is that this major decision on the author's part is fully justified. The earlier mainsprings of Indian nationalism and Muslim separatism for two eventful decades require a re-assessment just as the contribution of Gandhi to India's freedom has to be projected as the most important single element in a developing situation.

This is a book written with imagination and a commitment to historical facts. There is meticulous care in preparing the footnotes to each chapter making a clear distinction between the earlier writings which have been utilised and the new editions. The printing and production cannot be faulted. I could only locate, in spite of my anxious efforts, one single error, and that is a charming one. The word "Camps" is printed at the bottom of the wrong page. There is, however, no ambiguity. Obviously Murphy's Law works even in the best regulated printing presses.

There are only two important aspects of the freedom struggle which could have been emphasized a

little more than in this book. The first is the emergence of the socialist and the communist parties in the thirties and the forties and their relationship with mainstream Congress politics and with Gandhi and Nehru. The other is purely a subjective reaction. In projecting the image of Gandhi nothing is said about what in retrospect appears to be a major decision on his birthday in 1921 to discard the anonymity of the Gujarati-Hindu dress and adopt the loin cloth uniform. It was a very personal decision. It is also a major historical event. The image of Gandhi in the eyes of the Indian people could never be the same again. It is interesting to recall that not one of his colleagues, not even Vallabhbhai emulated him in this adventurous decision. Images are important in the 20th century and as interesting as Gandhi's loin cloth, is the Gandhi cap which he discarded from this time and which became associated with Jawaharlal Nehru and other senior Congress leaders. To the wide world outside, in fact, the Gandhi cap was Nehru's own patented trade mark. Such are the ironies of personal history in a major political revolution which depended much on the image as on the reality. The loin cloth, the spinning wheel, Khadi, 'the livery of freedom', and salt were necessary symbols to distinguish 'us' from 'them' in a non-violent struggle.

A.K. Damodaran, a former diplomat and a Senior Fellow at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (1980-81) is a well-known commentator on international affairs.

COMMONWEALTH WRITERS PRIZE 1999

Entries close on November 15, 1998



To encourage and reward the upsurge of new Commonwealth fiction and to ensure that works of merit reach a wider audience outside their country of origin, the Commonwealth Writers Prize was established in 1987.

The Commonwealth Foundation and the Book Trust, London, are now inviting entries for the current year. In 1999, there will be one award of Pounds 10,000 for the best book and one award of Pounds 3,000 for the best first published book. Awards of Pounds 1000 in each of the two categories will be given to winners in the four regions of the Commonwealth, Africa, Eurasia, The Caribbean and Canada, and South East Asia and South Pacific. Other rules apply.

Eligibility

Any work of prose fiction is eligible, i.e., a novel or collection of short stories. The work must have been written by a citizen of the Commonwealth, must be of a reasonable length and be in English. It must have been first published between 1 January and 31 December 1998.

Entries

Entries must be made by the publisher. In some countries, self published books may also be considered.

Entries are restricted to four books per publisher, that is, two in each category.

For further details, please contact

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The Moral Justification of Truth Commissions

Rajeev Bhargava

How must societies deal with grave injustice of the past? How do emerging democracies tackle the moral problems generated by gross violations of human rights in the old regime? In the recent past countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, El Salvador, Germany, Hungary, Rwanda have had to face these questions. A widely used instrument in many of these countries to address and to deal with these issues has been the Truth Commission. The government of South Africa also established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on 15 December 1995 to confront the brutality of the apartheid regime. It had the unenviable task of publicly recording gross abuse of human rights. More controversially, it had to recommend or refuse amnesty to the perpetrators. The Commission has completed its hearings and is currently writing its final report. In May 1998, a group of philosophers conducted a workshop in Capetown with members of the commission to throw light on the moral justification of such a commission and the painful dilemmas raised by it. Is it morally justified to grant amnesty to perpetrators simply because they own up a horrendous crime? Is truth more important than securing justice? Can justice be sacrificed for the sake of reconciling former victims and perpetrators? Rajeev Bhargava was among those invited to this workshop to present a paper entitled 'Is the Idea of A Truth Commission Justified?' The following article is excerpted from that paper.

In this extract, Bhargava begins his argument by first distinguishing minimally decent and barbaric societies and then draws a distinction between two kinds of barbaric societies which he calls symmetrical and asymmetrical. The first distinction, he claims, is relevant for the general justification of the idea of a truth commission, the second necessary to properly fine tune the idea to suit different kinds of transitions. He argues then that individual and collective forgetting of past harms is neither fully possible nor desirable, and that to ask victims to overcome their emotions of hatred and resentment towards perpetrators or to suppress their inherited animosities towards rival groups is to fail both to address their needs and to grasp the requirements of a transition from barbaric to minimally decent situations, i.e. the restoration of a system of basic procedural justice. Since the idea of a truth commission involves public remembrance and since recognition of the need for expressing retributive emotions and coming face to face with one's past is integral to it, and since without such collective acknowledgement a system of basic procedural justice cannot be reinstated, truth commissions have strong moral justifications in their favour. This much is already there in this condensed version of his paper. In the original, longer version he also shows how difficult it is for victims to publicly recall crimes and for perpetrators to acknowledge them and therefore why a public device that helps achieve this needs to be commended. He points out that critics of the idea of a truth commission do not always understand this. They are also unable to see, he claims, that by public announcement and reiteration of a restored moral threshold, truth commissions perform an important symbolic function. The consolidation of a minimally decent society is impossible without a continuous, collective reaffirmation of commitment to prevent evil. These, he argues, are all that a truth commission can aim at. However, it may do more by creating conditions for reconciliation. It may give members an opportunity to own up collective responsibility, confront themselves and effect a deeper change in their ideas of who they are. It may even create conditions for forgiveness, an act Bhargava defends, on moral grounds. Critics of forgiveness fail to properly grasp the radical fallibility in humans, their propensity for wrongdoing and correspondingly the great need for forgiveness within all of us. If a truth commission is able to create conditions for it, he claims, we possess an additional justification for it.

What justifies the very idea of a truth commission? I begin answering this question by distinguishing two human situations, one marked by the complete breakdown of a system of moral rules and the other governed by it. By moral rules I mean rules that prevent excessive wrongdoing, i.e. evil, and not those which promote particular conceptions of the good or embody substantive values, including a substantive conception of justice.¹ Once these aspects of morality are bracketed the remaining part of a system of morality contains a series of negative injunctions and what Stuart Hampshire calls basic procedural justice. Indeed, basic procedural justice may be seen to lie at the core of a system of moral rules that prevents evil. A situation where great evils are perpetrated by stable norms of basic procedural justice may be called a minimally decent society. The other situation that has crossed the threshold of even minimal decency may be called a barbaric society. For a minimally decent society to be realized, an agreement from within their respective world views among

groups and individuals on norms of basic procedural justice is sufficient. Further agreement on conceptions of the good and perhaps on substantive justice is not necessary. In barbaric societies normative agreement even on basic procedural justice has come apart.

I wish to argue that the primary function of a truth commission is to help societies move from barbaric to minimally decent societies, and, in the aftermath of evil, to reinstate confidence in norms of basic procedural justice. A truth commission stabilizes a system of basic procedural justice by (i) remembering and acknowledging grave injustice in the past and (ii) by getting perpetrators to own up responsibility for excessive wrong doings. To enable people to publicly recall past harms and express retributive emotions and to get perpetrators to admit wrong doing is not as easy as it seems to critics of the idea of a truth commission, or so I shall try to establish. I also argue that a truth commission must be seen to perform Operative acts, i.e. acts that institute a new system of rules.

In a minimally decent society former victims are not reconciled with their former oppressors nor are groups with inherited hostilities towards one another reunited. If so, the primary objec-

tive of a truth commission is not reconciliation but the institution of a minimally decent society. It doesn't rule out a future cancellation of estrangement, however. Indeed, a truth commission creates conditions for future reconciliation. It may do this by (iii) fixing collective responsibility in the appropriate way, and in so doing, changing the ideological climate that facilitates as far as possible, former oppressors to shed prejudice and for victims to regain their self respect. (iv) Since victims experience retributive emotions, truth commissions may permit their controlled expression and also help victims to eventually overcome them. When this happens, truth commissions could be seen also as instruments of forgiveness.

It is a mistake not to be suitably sensitive to the distinction between barbaric and minimally decent societies and to believe that identical moral responses suffice in both. A defense of the idea of a truth commission is predicated on this difference and my first objective is to emphasize the importance of recognizing it. However, another distinction needs to be kept in mind. Barbaric societies bifurcate into situations where the generation of evil is causally connected to the actions of a particular group that usually controls

the levers of political power and other situations in which social and political evil is collectively produced by everyone. In short, in the first kind of situation some groups and even individuals belonging to the group primarily responsible for evil continue to hold on to a distinctively moral point of view. The second kind of situation is beyond morality altogether. Here everyone or almost everyone has 'madness in the soul'. All hell has broken loose and with that the distinction between perpetrators and victims no longer holds. Afghanistan and the group of countries formerly called Yugoslavia provide the most recent examples of this monstrous universe. But for Indians, the partition of the subcontinent that left more than half a million dead and many more dispossessed remains a vivid, festering example of evil. Though not entirely appropriate I shall call the first situation an asymmetrically barbaric society and the second situation, a symmetrically barbaric society. Norms of basic procedural justice can come apart either if all relevant parties withdraw their consent to them or even when anyone does so. When neither party abides by norms of basic procedural justice then we descend into an amoral social universe, i.e. symmetri-

II

The world is peopled with
intimate enemies. No one
may be presumed innocent.
Not only is the distinction
between perpetrator and victim
erased but also between friend
and enemy, between those
who you love and those you
intensely hate.

cally barbaric society. When only one violates these norms and the other is keen to enforce them, and particularly when the violating group is politically dominant then we inhabit an asymmetrically barbaric society.

Since norms of basic procedural justice can be violated in two ways, perhaps two different kinds of truth commissions are required to meet the specific demands in each of the two situations. Both kinds may perform the function listed above but the one that takes societies from asymmetrically barbaric to minimally decent situations needs to become part of a more complex strategy to include not only symbolic but real reparation to former victims. Perhaps, when we ascend from symmetrically barbaric society to reach the threshold of basic procedural justice, a commitment to or an agreement on any substantial conception of justice is unnecessary. On the other hand, when we move away from an asymmetrically barbaric society in order to reach the same threshold, we may need to make some reference also to the substantial values of victims. This need not involve a general agreement from within but an enforced concession by the once dominant group towards the substantial conception of justice of their former victims is unavoidable. Or else, a general commitment to basic procedural justice and therefore a minimally decent and peaceful society is unlikely to follow. The first truth commission, by placing responsibility for wrong-doing squarely on the entire collective, may assume moral equivalence between individual perpetrators and victims. The second kind of truth commission, if it is to succeed at all, must refuse such equivalence and maintain a morally relevant distinction between victims and perpetrators. Such a distinction survives in a system governed by basic procedural justice if its point of departure was asymmetric rather than symmetrically barbaric society, and must find legal expression, possible even in the basic structure of the constitution.

Among contemporary philosophers, Stuart Hampshire has written insightfully about what I have called barbaric societies. The Second World War and in particular the horror of the Nazi regime provided the occasion for Hampshire to recognize social and political evil: "I learnt how easy it had been to organize the vast enterprises of torture and of murder, and to enroll willing workers in this field, once all moral barriers had been removed by the authorities. Unmitigated evil and nastiness are as natural, it seemed, in educated human beings as generosity and sympathy. . . . Once notions of fairness and justice are eliminated from public life and from people's minds and a 'bombed and flattened moral landscape' is created, there is nothing that is forbidden or off limits, and the way is fully open to natural violence and domination."² One now witnesses Evil: 'a force not only contrary to all that is praiseworthy, admirable, and desirable in human lives but which is actively working against all that is praiseworthy and admirable.'³ It is only against the background of evil that some of the most ordinary, commonplace but indispensable decencies of public and private life are brought into sharp relief.

For Hampshire, such evil cannot be prevented by substantial conceptions of justice over which there may be little agreement in society. He argues that in such situations what is required is basic procedural justice. This procedural justice is part of 'a bare minimum which is entirely negative and without this bare minimum as a foundation no morality directed towards the greater good can be applicable and can survive in practice.'⁴ Justice, on this view, involves fair procedures of negotiation, a sort of machinery of arbitration that forms the basis for the recognition of untidy and temporary compromises between incompatible visions of a better way of life.⁵ It is a means of enabling different conceptions of the good life to co-exist and as far as possible to survive without any substantial reconciliation between them and without a search for the common ground. Basic procedural justice makes possible a minimally decent life which has a value independent of any wider conception of the good. Its principal objective, in Hampshire's memorable phrase, is to prevent 'madness in the soul.'⁶

One implication of Hampshire's theory not drawn explicitly by him is

² Stuart Hampshire *Innocence and Experience*, CUP 1989, p. 8 & 69

³ *Ibid.*, p. 67

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-78, 109

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189

this: a proper moral response must be formulated with the greatest possible sensitivity to evil and its aftermath. Not all conceivable moral responses are contextually appropriate. In my view, at least three possible responses exist. A morally relevant distinction is not made by the first between a stable minimally decent society and a society in transition moving gradually towards procedural justice or at the start of a process of consolidating it (a society moving from barbaric society to minimally decent society). This first position argues that the same system of moral rules is applicable to both these situations. When people kill mercilessly, betray friends and family, save their own skins at the expense of loved ones, they breach the very moral norms that a serial killer does when he strikes or when a person swindles another for the greater accumulation of wealth. If so, the moral response to this violation must be identical. The second position recognizes the difference between a stable society where normal standards of morality and law apply (minimally decent society) and a condition where every moral norm has been eclipsed (barbaric society). It also recognizes that a reliance on a substantial morality or even the full set of rules of procedural justice is impracticable during a period of transition from barbaric society to minimally decent society. However, it does not adequately see, as the third position does, that the issue is not merely one of impracticability but of sensitivity to standards of appropriateness in relevant situations. It cannot understand that the move from a barbaric to a minimally decent society also requires that a group or even an entire collectivity be reeducated into a system of morality. The third position carefully notes this significant fact and admits that in a sense it is morally mistaken to elide the distinction between stable and transitional societies and that it is wrong to ask for more in transitional situations. I see this as a clear and endorsable implication of Hampshire's views on procedural justice.

However, much as I admire Hampshire's views, I find them somewhat wanting on two counts. The first is less an objection and more a demand to fully spell out the horror of barbaric society. We need to better recognize the scope and depth of evil, its reach and what all it destroys. Surely, Hampshire is right when he says that 'when Hitler deliberately substituted force for negotiation creating thereby a pliant and demoralized mass fit for domination, he destroyed morality itself in public life.'⁷ However, I wonder if he is cor-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 375

rect in saying that 'morality survived in families, among friends, in professions and perhaps in commerce.' Even if he were right about the state of morality during the Nazi regime, I am not so sure this is true of a situation where the threshold of morality has been transgressed by everybody. Evil has a way not merely of spilling over from the public into the private domain but of pervading our intimate life. When morality is destroyed in the public arena it does not leave the rest of the social world unaffected. Friends, lovers, members of the family can all be complications in crime. The world is peopled with intimate enemies. No one may be presumed innocent. Not only is the distinction between perpetrator and victim erased but also between friend and enemy, between those who you love and those you intensely hate. The sociologist, Veena Das reporting on victims of the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 talks of how the traumatic violence of the crowd suddenly revealed to one of its victims the fragility of her kinship universe.⁸ Shanti, the victim, disclosed that 'It was my own mama (mother's brother) who had advised my husband to hide. He revealed the hiding places of the Siglikar Sikhs to the leaders of the mob. He bartered their lives for his own protection. Go and see his house. Not even a broken spoon has been looted'. Tina Rosenberg gives a moving account of Vera and Knud Wollenberger, husband and wife, dissident members of the peace circle in communist East Germany who risked their jobs and their freedom and were constantly spied upon by the Stasi. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Vera joined the East German Parliament and campaigned for Stasi victims to access their personal files. When she eventually succeeded in accessing her own file, it was full of reports from a Stasi informer with code name "Donald" containing information that could have been known to only one person. "Donald" was her own husband.⁹

The writer Urvashi Butalia recounts the story of personal betrayal within her own family. While most members of her mother's family migrated from Lahore to Delhi across the border, one of her uncles, her mother's youngest brother, stayed back. To prevent harassment and possible eviction, he decided to embrace Islam. The primary motivation it appears was to inherit after the death of her grandmother, the family property. True, his choice to stay back and adopt Islam could be justified in terms of the value of personal

⁸ Veena Das, "Our Work to Cry: Your Work to Listen", in *Mirrors of Violence*, (Delhi 1990), 347-348

⁹ Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land*, (New York 1990) xi-xii.

autonomy. But what deeply hurt the rest of the family was his reluctance to send Urvashi's grandmother to India. This appeared to have undermined his mother's autonomy and deprived the rest of the family of her presence amidst them. Presumably, the uncle knew that her departure from Lahore would almost certainly have terminated his right to the family property.¹⁰

I hope it is clear by now that the crossing of the threshold of morality means not the violation of some norm implicit in a particular conception of the good, nor indeed the overstepping of a barrier created within that conception, but rather the breakdown of basic procedural justice that deprives people not only of a minimally decent public domain but also of love and affection in private life. Conversely, the restoration of basic procedural justice revives not only a healthy public arena but also intimate living.

My second point concerning Hampshire's view is a real objection. I do not think he sufficiently distinguishes asymmetric from symmetrically barbaric societies. The two differ not in the scale or quality of evil or in the significant absence of norms of basic procedural justice: both situations are deprived of justice and as a result face an enormous excess of wrong doing. However, this difference still remains that one is wound up by the aspiration of its victims to some morality, while the other has blown up all moral norms. Under Nazi or the apartheid regime, the outraged moral sense of some victims still survives; after all only the perpetrators can be held responsible for suspending basic procedural justice and not the victims. This is why, by legitimately calling upon norms of justice, victims can claim that they have been wronged by a group and by its immoral system. In symmetrically barbaric society, the responsibility for the breakdown of justice is shared by everyone and therefore no one can claim moral immunity by professing unique victimhood.¹¹ Hampshire carefully registers the moral validity in transitional situations of the third response mentioned above but not that it must be more finely sculpted to answer different manifestations of evil. He does not fully see that a society

aspiring to move towards or consolidate minimally decent society could have had different points of departure, and therefore the institutional mechanisms embodying a complex moral response may also have to be different.

If I am correct then it is a matter of great importance to judge whether or not a given social state of affairs has crossed the threshold of morality, how and to what extent. It is mistaken to expect, when it has, that normal justice will be immediately available to everybody. Equally, if the threshold has been crossed in one rather than another way, by one group rather than everyone, then it is hopelessly wrong to believe that the institutional mechanisms appropriate for say a transition from a symmetrically barbaric to minimally decent society is also valid for transition from an asymmetrically barbaric to a minimally decent society. A society such as South Africa occupies a delicate, unstable ground and unless fully alert its members can easily walk into two explosive moral land mines. If victims in South Africa behave as if they have at their command a consolidated system of procedural and substantial justice, then by this very action they can precipitate a slide into symmetrically barbaric society. If former victims don the mantle of victors and seek comprehensive retributive justice in either its no-nonsense revolutionary or its liberal democratic form, then they may instantly turn into victims all former perpetrators and beneficiaries. If the distinction between victims and perpetrator is obliterated, South Africa will turn like former Yugoslavia or like India during its partition. This would be a disaster because South Africa has had a monstrous political regime within a roughly moral social universe but has not before descended into an amoral social universe. It has been an asymmetric not asymmetrically barbaric society. It would also be a mistake to view the situation in South Africa as dominated by features widely prevalent in symmetrically barbaric society. A failure to recognize that perpetrators and victims are clearly demarcated within South Africa can also push it beyond the threshold of morality. If Black victims and their White oppressors are treated identically or if the deep humiliation of the victims is not properly addressed, we may yet find that for victims the road to minimally decent society may inevitably seem to go via a regression to a symmetrically barbaric society. The deep irony in South Africa is that at the very moment it begins to consolidate a system of basic procedural justice and perhaps move beyond it, it faces the greatest danger of hurtling into an amoral universe. In

taking its first step from an asymmetrically barbaric society towards minimal decency and beyond, it can swiftly slide into a symmetrically barbaric society. When after years of deeply humiliating and exploitative regime of apartheid, South Africa moved relatively peacefully to a democratic system, in one fell swoop it created a deep moral dilemma for the oppressed Blacks. One false move on their part can send the whole country spiralling from a clearly recognizable moral universe into a condition of complete moral normlessness—a condition it has never witnessed before. This is why I believe South Africa needs a truth commission, albeit of the second kind.

It is equally mistaken to treat societies emerging from symmetrically barbaric situations, as if they were bouncing back from asymmetrically barbarism. Consider once again India going through political partition. The fear and radical uncertainty generated by new borders drawn on the basis of religion forced people from their homes in order to live securely with people of their own ilk. More than ten million people crossed borders. To say that this 'transfer of population' was violent is an understatement. Nearly a million were slaughtered and almost a hundred thousand women were abducted and raped by marauders belonging to a religion other than their own. Responsibility for this savagery cannot however be laid at the door of any single religious group or set of individuals. In such situations to speak of or revive the distinction between victim and perpetrator or to make the 'victim's status as victim the constitutive pillar of a new political order' would amount to perpetuation of evil.¹²

III

Let me begin this section by quasi-phenomenologically examining the experiential condition of victims in the aftermath of evil. What, in the aftermath of evil are their expectations and are they legitimate? Two responses are typical among them. One is to disengage from the world, of which the numbing of emotions is at once a symptom and constituent. The second re-

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sponse of engagement with the world takes many forms. It involves both an obligation to oneself, say to overcome personal trauma, and an obligation to other victims, especially to people to whom we remain attached even after their death. It is a recognizable need in victims still engaged with this world to tell their story, to relate their own version of events, to point out the aggressor and amplify the aggression. Understandably, victims experience deep resentment and hatred towards those responsible for their misery and are frequently moved by revenge. To identify the perpetrator of the crime, to publicly tell what he did and how, to get him to publicly acknowledge this and to feel strongly that he be punished is a fairly common experiential condition of the victim. If the function of truth commissions is to enable victims to express and fulfill even a part of these needs, then a positive evaluation of these needs must go a long way toward justifying them. If truth commissions fulfill these needs of transitional societies, then we might say that they are necessary and sufficient in such contexts.

Against the argument that truth commissions are sufficient and necessary in societies transiting from barbaric society to minimally decent society, two opposing criticisms can be levelled. The first view holds that a truth commission does far too little and is clearly inadequate. Its fact finding function can be performed by commissions of human rights abuses. Its cathartic functions can as easily be performed by private bodies. What the victims need, so the argument goes, is real social justice, not symbolic reparations that follow forced forgiveness. Besides, how can murderers be allowed to walk free merely by disclosing what

¹⁰Urvashi Butalia *The Other Side of Silence*, Viking, Penguin India, 1998.
¹¹I realize that some societies embody both situations and are therefore marked by a fundamental ambiguity. For example consider East European societies and the communist. Its citizens were at once victims and complicitous to a great extent in maintaining a repressive regime. Perhaps we need to identify a transitional situation where over time people become their own worst enemies and together make their own hell. For a perceptive account of post-communist societies, see Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land*.

¹²I here react to the discussion among Kanan Makiya, Charles Maier and Yael Tamir at the International meeting on truth commissions organized by the World Peace Foundation. I believe that the distinction I draw between situations (b) and (c) help clarify what is at stake. Clearly, there exists a situation where the new moral order must not immediately erase the status of the victim, just as it would be wrong to retain it in another. The answer to Kanan Makiya's question: should we establish commonality on the basis of rights or on the recognition of pain must be determined contextually. See, Henry J. Steiner, (ed.), *Truth Commissions, A Comparative Assessment*, World Peace Foundation Reports (Cambridge, 1997), p. 31.

is public knowledge anyway? Therefore, truth commissions neither provide an adequate strategy to deal with past injustice nor achieve reconciliation. I do not here address this critique. But there is the radically opposed view for which truth commissions inherently do more than is required in such situations. Those who hold this view inundate the victim with advice to check emotions. Rather than tell publicly and remember past injustice, victims are exhorted to forget. They are asked to contain hatred, overcome resentment, in short to condone or immediately forgive. Revenge to which resentment may lead them, they are told, is unbecoming of civilized people, full anyway of terrible consequences for society. These critics draw a distinction between the felt needs of the victim and the real needs of the entire community and suggest that the two often run against one another. Is it not difficult to reconcile the current needs of the person qua victim and future needs qua citizen of a well ordered society? Instead of focusing on the past, the victim is told to think of the future. In brief, on this view truth commissions are dangerous or unnecessary, at best. It is this critique that I primarily address here.

What is wrong with forgetting? Is it not true that remembrance of past harm reinforces asymmetries of power? The fear of physical suffering in the future feeds on the remembrance of past acts of repression. It encourages passivity and obedience in victims that serves the interests of the powerful. But such remembrances cut both ways. If memory of suffering is kept alive, reprisal is always possible at a future, opportune moment. Therefore, among former victims, a motivated forgetfulness of their own wrong doing, accompanied with the hope that former victims will quickly forget past suffering is not uncommon when asymmetries of power are dissolved. In this context, calls to let bygones, to wipe the slate clean or start afresh, work unabashedly in favour of perpetrators of crime. Forgetting cannot be brought about intentionally. The demand on the victim to forget past injustice is in reality an injunction to forgive or to not publicly recall past injustice.

Most calls to forget disguise the attempt to prevent victims from publicly remembering in the fear that 'there is a dragon living on the patio and we had better not provoke it'.¹³ But it is doubtful if this is a good strategy for repairing wounds or achieving reconciliation. When a person is wronged, he is

made not only to suffer physically but is mentally scarred, the most injurious of which is the damage to his sense of self respect, if he is left with any residue of it. As Jeffrie Murphy points out when a person is wronged he receives a message of his marginality and irrelevance.¹⁴ The wrongdoer conveys that in his scheme of things the victim counts for nothing. Since self esteem hinges upon critical opinion of the other, the message sent by the wrongdoer significantly lowers the self esteem of the wronged. The insult and degradation inflicted is in fact a deeper moral injury. This loss of self esteem is not addressed by demands to forget past injuries. Indeed, it inflicts further damage. Asking victims to forget past evils is to treat them as if no great wrong to them has been done, as if they have nothing to feel resentful about. This can only diminish them further. There is another way this happens to which Jeremy Waldron has drawn our attention: "When we are told to let bygones be bygones, we need to bear in mind also that the forgetfulness being urged on us is seldom the blank slate of historical oblivion. Thinking quickly fills up the vacuum with plausible tales of self-satisfaction, on the one side, and self-deprecation on the other."¹⁵ Beneficiaries of injustice then come to believe that gains accrue to them due to the virtue of their race or culture and victims too easily accept that their misfortune is caused by inherent inferiority. Waldron is on to something important here. The call to forget reinforces loss of self esteem in the victim. Furthermore, neglected moral injuries putrefy demoralization in the victim. Under these conditions, past perpetrators feel that they can get away with murder and they grow in confidence that such injuries can be inflicted without resistance even in future. Therefore, rather than prevent, forgetting ends up facilitating wrong acts. I can't help but conclude that proper remembrance alone restores dignity and self respect to the victim.

A proper remembrance is critical if wounds of the victim are to be healed. It is also necessary to fulfill the collective need of a badly damaged society. This view comes up against a pervasive social condition as well as against Hobbes's argument. It is an uncomfortable fact that while societies remember their heroic deeds they suppress memories of collective injustice. Recall Ernest Renan's remark that nations are constituted by a lot of forgetting. In a perceptive essay, Sheldon Wolin won-

ders if collective memory is an accomplice of injustice and whether by its silence on collective wrongs, it does not signify the very limits of justice.¹⁶ But he also asks if a society can ever afford to remember events in which members feel tainted by a 'kind of corporate complicity in an act of injustice done in their name.' Can France remember the Saint Bartholomew massacre, America, its civil war, India, its partition? Can these be remembered by being represented in civic rituals? One philosopher who thought collective forgetting necessary was Thomas Hobbes. Suppression of memories of past wrongs was essential because if society is treated as a building made of stones then some stones that have an 'irregularity of figure take more room from others' and so must be discarded.¹⁷ Hobbes's covenant was a device to incorporate social amnesia into the foundation of society. Commenting on this, Wolin remarks that a necessary condition of social amnesia, for Hobbes, was that men dehistoricize themselves.

Is dehistoricization possible? I think not. Besides, to imagine that as grievances recede into the past and are half-forgotten, they will somehow cease to be real is to live in a fool's paradise. As Ignatieff puts it 'Collective Myth has no need of personal memory or experience to retain its force.' A band of political adventures who also happen to be Muslims invaded India in the 12th century but for many Hindus, Muslims continue to be invaders who may kill, destroy and convert them. The conquest of Quebec by the English happened more than two centuries ago but for Quebec nationalists their nationalist project 'involves a reconquest of the conquest.' A large part of nationalist agenda all over the world is about settling old scores. In so many countries people remarkably similar in essential respects appear to go at each other's throat simply because once upon a time one ruled over the other. A strategy of forgetting has simply not worked. Only an appropriate engagement with the past makes then for a livable common future. It is true of course that one must guard against cosmetic remembrance. An engagement with the past must take place at the level of emotions. If not properly addressed grievances and resentments resurface. Oddly, animosity between groups is sustained even when it goes against their current interests. This happens because emotional reactions ingrained in the human mind remain insensitive to altered cir-

cumstances and are bequeathed from generation to generation. Like property, animosities are inherited too!¹⁸

Nonetheless, former victims and fragmented societies eventually need to get on with their lives rather than be consumed by their suffering. Perhaps victims need to forget just about as much as they need to remember.¹⁹ People who carry deep resentment and grievance against one another are hardly likely to build a society together. Therefore, to ask people to forget is not entirely unreasonable. I believe timing is the essence of the issue here. Forgetting too quickly or without redressal, by failing to heal adequately, inevitably brings with it a society haunted by its past. One can't forget entirely, too soon and without a modicum of justice. Clearly, while some forgetting at an appropriate time is necessary, a complete erasure is neither sufficient nor desirable for healing or consolidating a minimally decent society. Moreover, while specific acts of wrong doing need to be forgotten eventually, a general sense of the wrong and of the horror of evil acts must never be allowed to recede from collective memory. Such remembering is crucial to prevent acts of wrongdoing in the future. I conclude that without a proper engagement with the past and an institutionalized remembrance, societies are condemned to repeat, reenact and relive the horror. Forgetting is not a good strategy for societies transiting to a minimally decent society from asymmetrically or symmetrically barbaric situations.

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¹⁸ On this see Hume, 'Of Parties in general' in *Political Writings*, p. 160.

¹⁹ Michael Lapsley, member of the African National Congress was a victim of the letter bomb in which he lost both his hands and an eye and shattered his eardrums. He writes, 'For a very small amount of time I thought it would have been better to have died. I had never met anyone without hands so I did not know that life could be meaningful. I was faced with some important questions and one of them was: Do I allow my life to be consumed with hatred, bitterness, self-pity and desire for revenge? (Later) I realized that if I was to spend the rest of my life looking for revenge or hunting for those who had sent me that letter bomb, it would consume me. The result was that I was able to say: "I am going to live my life as fully, as joyfully, as completely as possible and that is my victory."' Veena Das notes that the behaviour of women victims of the Sikh massacre in 1984 in Delhi—their tendency to grab everything from various relief agencies—did not match middle class expectations of dignified behaviour and was initially very puzzling. Later she saw it as a healthy sign of women recovering and re-engaging in life. The need to correct as many relief goods as they could get gave some structure to women's activities and helped them to think of the future, to symbolize it in the new commodities that relief was bringing in their lives.' See Das, *Mirrors*, p. 366.

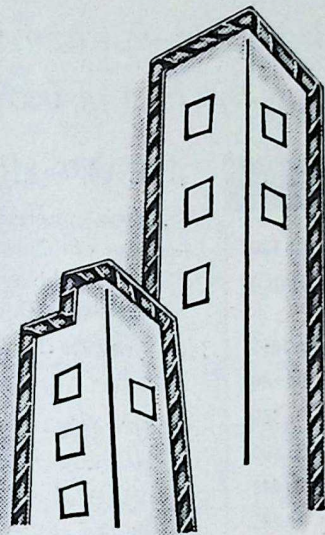
¹⁴ Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment" in Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 25.

¹⁵ Jeremy Waldron, "Superseding Historic Injustice", *Ethics*, Volume 103, (1992), p. 6.

¹⁶ Sheldon Wolin, 'Injustice and Collective Memory' in *The Presence of the Past*, (Baltimore and London, 1989), pp. 32-46.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

¹³ Quoted from Tina Rosenberg in Alex Boraine, Janet Levy and Ronel Scheffer, *Dealing with the Past* (Idasa, 1997), p. 66.



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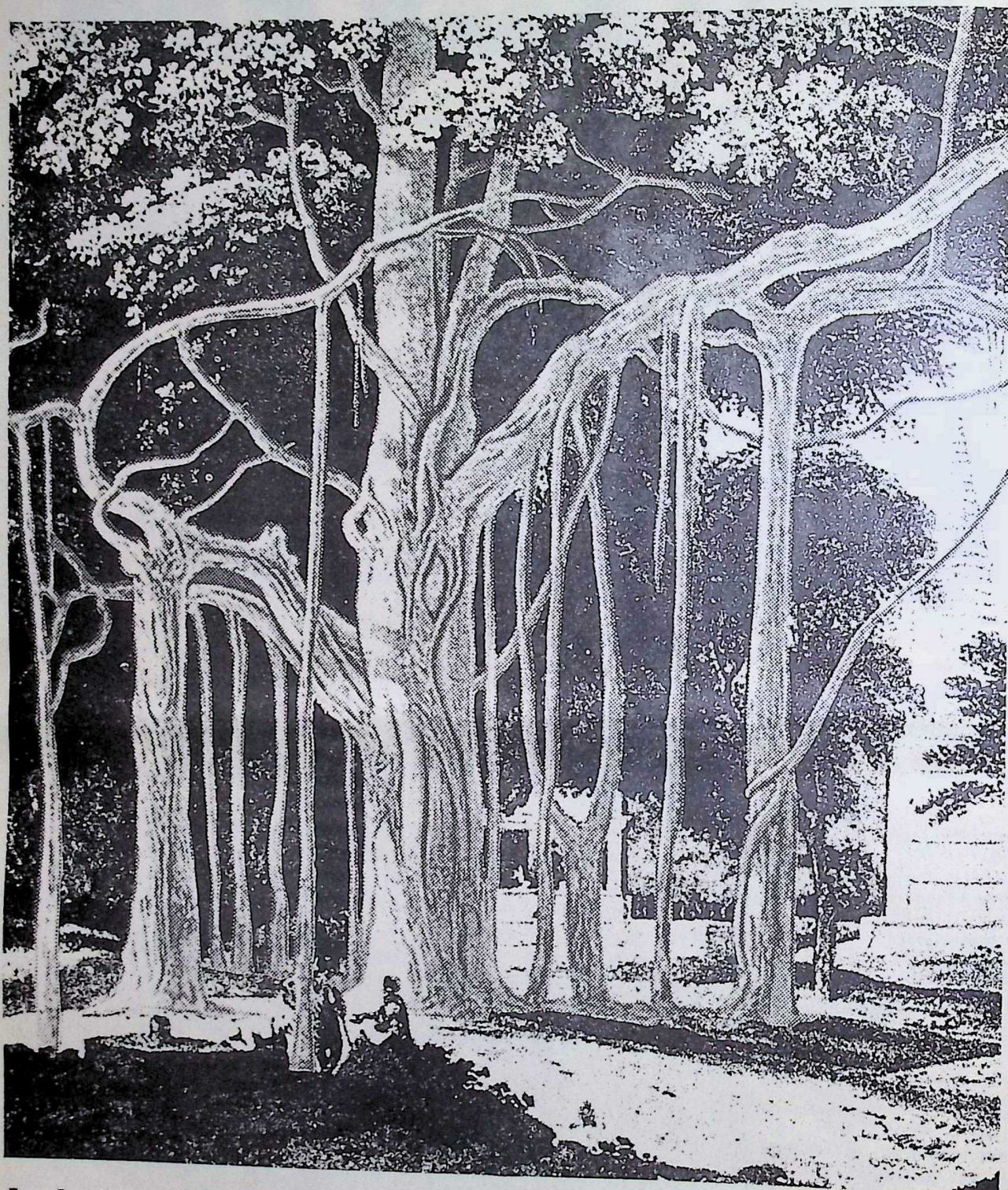
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Nandini Sunder

A DESPOTISM OF LAW: CRIME AND JUSTICE IN EARLY COLONIAL INDIA

By Radhika Singha

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp. 342, Rs. 550.00

Last month, I was called upon to stand bail for a friend of mine for a relatively minor offence. Normally, the police would not even have condescended to make arrests. Yet, because some VIP had happened to be somewhere in the vicinity of the alleged misdemeanour, days went by, and there was no sign of bail. In place of the dramatic courtroom scenes I had come to expect from Hindi films, there was a harassed looking judge in a small crowded room, a defence lawyer who scuttled about and muttered a few things, and an investigating officer who merely lied through his teeth. A week later, I had fully experienced the despotism of the law.

In this remarkable book Radhika Singha brings to light the early history of colonial law making and the long drawn process of what Marx Galanter has referred to as 'the expropriation of (indigenous) law'. Singha starts her book by noting Macaulay's presumption that the clean legal sweep envisaged by the draft penal code of 1837 was possible because of the 'enlightened and paternal despotism' of the colonial state, and ends by concluding that in fact "major changes in substantive law were limited, because so many conceptual battles had already been fought and won in this sphere." (p. 299) Her book is a sustained exposition of the historical, cultural and legal issues around which these battles were fought, the manner in which the colonial state struggled with and accommodated indigenous conceptions of rank or notions of justice, while at the same time it extended its principles of sovereign right and political authority. There was a constant backward and forward motion, as the state looked over its shoulders to a 'traditionally conceived public' while attempting to constitute a new normative codes. This question of heterogeneous publics, including diverse British ones, to which judicial changes were addressed, and in the context of which legal interpretation was fashioned, is one of the most interesting insights of the book. Yet like

much else, it has had to be compressed into a woefully small corner, to accommodate other insights, leaving the reader with the feeling that Singha could profitably have written a dozen books based on the material she has presented here. The book has a chronological and geographical unity—dealing with judicial enterprise in the Bengal Presidency (including Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and non-regulation tracts like the Sagar and Nerbudda territories), from about 1765 to 1837. However, it is perhaps better read as a collection of essays dealing with different subjects but woven around a common theme.

For some surprising reason, given that the law is so much a part of us, both legal history and legal anthropology have been vastly neglected fields in South Asia. Apart from a few articles by 'Subalternists' (see Ranajit Guha on abortion in 'Chandra's Death' and Shahid Amin on approver's testimony) and others (see Michael Anderson and Sumit Guha ed. *Changing Conceptions of Rights and Justice in South Asia*, 1998), historians en masse have failed to tap this rich source. While there are studies of thuggee, sati, infanticide and other such practices which came to be criminally defined (see for example the works of Lata Mani, Anand Yang, Sandria Freitag), the focus there is largely on understanding these practices in themselves, rather than as in Singha's book, for what they illustrate about law or the extension of state right. Among anthropologists/sociologists, while the study of disputing processes was often an essential part of village studies, and we have a few studies of village or caste panchayats (see section on conflict resolution in Jayaram and Saberwal ed. *Social Conflict*, 1996) there is very little on modern law courts (with a few exceptions like Baxi, Mendelsohn or Galanter) or other applications of the law. Feminist scholarship on law is increasing (see Ratna Kapur ed. *Feminist Terrains in Legal Domains*, 1996), but the quantity is nothing to write home about. This listing of work is hardly exhaustive, but the message is clear—legal studies is a field waiting to explode in

A DESPOTISM OF LAW

CRIME & JUSTICE IN EARLY COLONIAL INDIA

RADHIKA SINGHA



India in the way that ecology has. Singha's book seems set, by the weight of its scholarship and the range of issues addressed, to be in the forefront of this explosion.

The process by which Anglo Indian law came to subsume and displace existing legal processes is familiar in its broad outline, though the details may be disputed. Scholars like J.D.M. Derrett, Bernard Cohn, Marc Galanter or Vasudha Dhagamwar have in one way or another pointed to the manner in which indigenous codes were retained in the civil sphere while criminal law was subject to a more sweeping overhaul. The kind of indigenous law that was retained was one that had been developed in consultation with Hindu or Muslim elites, and was thus more textual, more shastric than that which in fact governed the conduct of the masses. Yet, what marks Radhika Singha's book is the historical detail she brings to her analysis, which in turn makes us rethink too easy a generalization of the process, at the same time as she provides a fairly comprehensive account of how criminal law and institutions came to develop in a certain period. We are provided not only with the dilemmas of colonial law makers (the history of jurisprudence), but also a dose of the ideology by which offenders acted and by which they expected to be punished and their reactions when the law operated under different rules. The rest of this review will highlight selectively, as well as briefly, the arguments made in each chapter.

The first chapter deals with the transition from a Mughal order to the company's judiciary in both institutional and legal terms. Colonial authorities castigated certain principles

of Islamic law—such as the exercise of discretion in the choice of punishment or tailoring of the punishment to the income of the offender, or as in some successor states, the overlapping of judicial and revenue functionaries—as indicative of extreme venality. Yet discretion continued to be central to colonial criminal law, especially in the manner in which it dealt with persons who were branded as part of suspect communities. The second chapter examines the manner in which the new identity of legal subject before the colonial state had to compete with a variety of other (e.g. caste, gender) identities. Simultaneously, legal shifts around criminal intention, mitigating circumstances, value of confessions etc. changed the expectations of parties involved and the basis on which they conducted themselves in court. The Company's means of gathering information was necessarily inflected with local relations of power. For instance, the *surathal* was not an eyewitness account or a complaint lodged by the plaintiff, but a composite attestation based on some sort of fact-finding by the *amil* and local notables. Elite participation in the framing of the *surathal* gradually grew more reluctant as their participation in court created problems of stature. Among other things, taking oaths was seen as denigrating by elites, implying that they stood in an equal relationship to the ruling authority as did other commoners. As against provisions in Islamic law which concentrated on the consequences of a criminal act for the injured party and the victim's (or his heirs') right to compensation, the thrust of colonial law was to redefine the crimes as offences against the state or public at large. Consequently, punishment became harsher. Faced with a death penalty for the offender, the relatives of many victims, still operating within an older normative code of victim's rights to retaliation—were reluctant to have the blood on their hands. In this chapter, Singha substantially extends Jorge Fisch's argument that in doing away both with what they saw as the mildness of Islamic law (the exacting rules of evidence) and the barbarity of punishments like mutilation, colonial law was in many respects harsher than anything known before, especially in its use of capital punishment.

The way in which colonial criminal law entered into accommodations with indigenous hierarchies and forms of victimisation emerges most clearly from the third chapter which deals with two anomalies in the law relating to homicide: the exemption Brahmins enjoyed from the death penalty and the tolerance shown to those who assisted in

sati. The whole discussion of Brahmins inflicting violence on themselves or preferably on the weakest female member of their family as a form of bringing shame on the other is fascinating not only for the light it throws on indigenous normative codes, but as Denis Vidal has pointed out, for its presaging of Gandhian satyagraha tactics. While others have remarked on the fact that the domestic sphere was maintained as outside the purview of the state by both the colonial authorities and nationalists, Singha takes up the issue of how the boundaries of the domestic sphere itself were defined. In chapter four she deals with the subjects of infanticide, adultery, fornication and enticement. While domestic slavery in terms of the sale of women and children may have been curtailed, and an attempt made to demarcate the affective domestic sphere, the scope for patriarchy within this sphere was strengthened through the judicial underpinnings given to a discourse of honour.

Chapter five deals with the attempt to eradicate thuggee and the tension between a supposed need for extraordinary laws to deal with an extraordinary kind of criminal, and the need to have a more standard system. There are two aspects to this that deserve highlighting—one is Singha's deconstruction of thuggee itself as the work not of organized gangs, but roving bands of demobilised or would-be soldiers, or peasants driven to combine their normal forms of subsistence with highway robbery etc. The second is her point that the whole build up of information on thuggee, "actually disguised an inability to acquire information which could bring the specific offence home to the offender" (p. 217). Though Singha herself is silent on this, it would be interesting to reflect on the similarities between the thuggee legislation and TADA. Chapter six goes on to study penal reform—including issues such as the use of outdoor convict labour to build roads, the way in which public

hangings backfired, the influence of the medial profession, the moves towards a standardization of penal procedures, including messing (providing cooked food rather than raw rations to prisoners), yet accompanied by concerns about which castes could eat together. The epilogue touches upon the issue of racial equality before law among other things. All this is a mere fraction of what the book contains, and many will read it again and again, gleaned different nuggets of information and ideas each time.

Every book generates its own wish list—things readers would have liked the author to have done or written about. One such wish would have been an appendix containing the various Acts or Regulations Singha refers to in the text. The major criticism of the book, however, has to do with the descriptive footnotes. In a substantial number of pages, the text consists of one or two paragraphs while the footnotes hog the rest of the page. Many of these could

easily have been omitted without any damage to the argument, while others would have been more profitably deployed in the text itself. One can understand Singha's eagerness to share interesting asides with the reader, but at some level it becomes self-indulgence. While it may be good value for money to get two books (text and footnotes) for the price of one, is it fair to readers to destroy their pleasure in a book by so many footnotes? Readers should also be warned that with or without footnotes, this is not bedtime reading, owing to the sheer density of information and ideas. It took me approximately a week of full time committed reading.

Minor caveats apart, this is an extremely valuable book, which one hopes, will act as the spark for a brave new field of historical and social studies of the law.

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State, Society and the Law

Usha Ramanathan

CHANGING CONCEPTS OF RIGHTS AND JUSTICE IN SOUTH ASIA

Edited by Michael R. Anderson and Sumit Guha

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp. 288, Rs. 495.00

The relationship that law forges between the state and society is inadequately represented in writings on legal history. It is not difficult to see that law is made, practised and traditionalized in its own image. Standardizing the processes of law-making, drawing upon precedents, and institutionalizing justicing have contributed to making this happen. Law is also a means by which, sometimes covertly, at other times more obviously, the concerns and prejudices of those in control acquire legitimacy, certainty and continuity. Dislodging interests which have taken root in the law would call for further exercises in law-making—a process that may, in certain instances, be activated only through law-breaking. In this movement for change, legal history, which explores the dynamics of the law, legal institutions and legitimized power acquires a relevance. The papers in this volume, which are predominantly presentations in legal history and include some work on more contemporary human rights issues and movements, signal a renewed interest in this field of study.

Lawyers looking at law tend to concentrate on 'black-letter' law, and to limit themselves to finding doctrinal coherence in the development of law—a rather insular approach, to which the editors allude. Work by historians has tended to "eschew questions of doctrinal development", and "there has been little work exploring how legal concepts have been appropriated or manipulated by different groups in civil society". (p. 2) Anthropologists have stayed with "popular idioms of justice, but these generally ignore the doctrinal details of state law, and do little to explore the dialogue between official and demotic legal concepts". (p. 2) With this introduction, the logic of stringing together a set of disparate papers written by historians, anthropologists, economists and others, besides lawyers, stands explained.

Sumit Guha's article, located in the 18th century, attempts to tease out a conception of rights, and of their recognition, from instances he culls out from history. And he concludes that if the various rights of "men and women, chiefs and servants, peasants and clerks,

buffoons and prostitutes" had a source, "it was the dead past resurrected in the present as custom; and custom... was largely an epitome of past balances of social power". (p. 26) This is an interesting lead up to Radhika Singha's description and acute analysis of "...Colonial Criminal Justice in the Benaras Zamindari, 1781-95". Her work traces the intersection between the colonial delineation of criminal law and the practices that were in place when the Company's criminal law and courts intervened. There is the snapping of connection between revenue collection and investigation into crime which appears to have happened between 1795 and 1807, when police powers were taken away from amils and vested in a

police darogha appointed by the British Magistrate. (p. 37) The changing position of the elite and of 'respectable' persons in investigating crimes, standing witness and in having their testimony being subjected to the oath is an interesting explanation of their growing alienation from matters of criminal justice. Islamic law which permitted relatives of the dead one to "pardon the offender, or to claim *diya*, blood-money, instead of insisting on retaliation, *kisas*" drew sharp criticism from British officials. For, "the law regulating *kisas* seemed to concentrate too narrowly on 'giving satisfaction' to the heirs of the deceased, instead of the injury to the 'public satisfaction' equated here with the punitive claims of the state" (p. 42).

Upon examining a range of cases and the modifications made from Islamic law to suit British official sensibility, Radhika remarks: "Shifts around the themes of criminal intention, premeditation, and 'mitigating circumstances' began to alter the expectations of parties brought to the criminal courts. In 1793, a regulation in the Bengal Presidency imposed capital punishment for wilful murder, even if the heirs of the deceased had extended a pardon or accepted compensation... In 1797 composition was prohibited in all serious crimes. So there was little incentive now for the thief brought to court to offer to make up the loss. This also discouraged victims of theft or robbery from bringing their suspect to trial if they had any hope of persuading or coercing him to repay. These changes in judicial procedure and in judicial

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reasoning by which sentences were formulated also changed the expectations with which a prisoner made a confession in court" (pp. 52-53). A marked change, indeed.

The informal acceptance of coerced confessions while retaining a formal acceptance of torture which Radhika notices (pp. 53-54) is evidence that this hypocrisy has lasted centuries! That a person had to be found guilty, and an offender could not be punished according to "the degree of suspicion of guilt" (p. 55) seems to have given confession preeminence which, perhaps, led to the tolerance of torture.

Radhika also addresses the complexity of crime within the home, the place of the "poor and the lowly" in criminal law, the changing nature of sentences, and touches upon the treatment of members of 'criminal tribes'.

Her thesis is compelling, and her attention to detail makes it convincing. Work of this kind could assist in understanding where things went wrong, even as it discourages romanticising the systems of the pre-British past.

Sandra Frietag's essay on the 'criminal tribes' and their depiction as a 'criminal tribe' attempts to explain both the oppression of stereotyping as well as the less obvious advantages of being part of a community recognized as such by the state. She concludes with the suggestion that "there may be direct connections between the alternative legal system established under the British for dealing with groups... and the kinds of debates underway now that challenge the claims non-Hindus make on civil society and the state." (p. 108) I would be curious to see how she builds on this hypothesis.

Arunima's detailing of the effect of patrilineal encoding of matrilineal 'custom' (p. 115) sets out the various interventions which whittled away the position, and control, of the woman in the Nayar matrilineal tharavad. It is illustrative of the manner in which centralized systems of decision-making can

insinuate dominant prejudices and prescriptions into different modes of life and practice.

The introduction of English law into India, the entrenching of gender inequality in the law, and the use of the transparent and convenient division into religious and secular matters, constitutes the narrative of Archana Parashar's paper on Christian personal law. Even as she says, "(w)hatever the merits of the religious sanctity argument in any other religious personal law, I hope this paper has established that Christian personal law in India was never religious in origin" (p. 164), there is implicit in the paper the position she has taken in her earlier work on family law reform and the Uniform Civil Code of the state's proven capacity to legislate on matters of personal law. What is new is her advocacy for the ground of irretrievable breakdown of marriage. Accompanied by "appropriate matrimonial reform", Archana argues that the ground of irretrievable breakdown will release "a lot of women who are trapped in unhappy marriages" (p. 168). While she has taken on board a number of possible objections to her proposal, there is the further question of the why of irretrievable breakdown having been considered but rejected in the Indian context. This may be particularly relevant since it was the interests of women which were cited while shelving the proposal. Also, the Supreme Court has, on occasion, drawn upon the principle of irretrievable breakdown when dealing with matrimonial issues. It has, in that process, done some apportioning of monies to provide "reasonably" for the woman. It may be useful to study this use of judicial discretion in determining what constitutes irretrievable breakdown and what is a fair arrangement of properties between the parties. Archana's outlining of the issue assumes that it is essentially economic incapacity which compels a woman to stay on in a bad marriage. There also appears to be an assumption that it is women who will find this ground of divorce helpful; an assumption that deserves enquiry.

In Radha Kumar's essay on the life and times of the mill workers in Bombay in the early years of this century, she uses demographic data as a backdrop to interpreting tales of sex and punishment, including stories of adultery and nose-cutting. Relying on newspaper reports and a few reported decisions, Radha Kumar raises a number of intriguing questions which remain unanswered due to the gaps in the reporting of the time. The connectedness between community authority and colonial courts, and their dissimilarities, do

however get portrayed in the instances she has picked up.

In setting out the "struggles and dilemmas" of untouchable women, R.S. Khare lets them speak in their own voice of their concerns and complaints. It is an exercise in introducing spoken testimonies to an academic readership.

Moving from issues of justice located in history or in the social context, the last three papers focus on struggle and human rights in times of violent dissent and division. Jani de Silva writes about the response of students to the violence-torn environment in which they live in Sri Lanka. Their views on armed struggle, the responsibilities of the state, and the army response to JVP killings of families of the armed forces, and their anxieties about being "caught in between the scissors of JVP intimidation and state repression" (p. 236) are recorded. He concludes with tossing out this caution: that if "the economic difficulties and lack of employment opportunities that have moved a large number to join movements like the JVP" are not contended with, in the words of a student "in five years time... such a movement will rise again" (p. 237).

The "instrumentalist approach to human rights" which Pritam Singh holds has been "the central characteristic of the human rights movement in Punjab" (p. 240), and the sectarianism which both Pritam Singh and Nilanjana Dutta recognize as a problem in the human rights movement, are depicted as challenges that will need to be met. Dutta also makes a pointed reference to "human rights diplomacy" (p. 275) with its corrosion of human rights "as a radical ideology", even as he acknowledges that the institutionalizing of human rights represents a victory for the movement. When Singh says: "Two forms of human rights abuse, namely false police encounters (the killing of political opponents in police custody) and 'disappearances'... were largely unheard of during colonial times" (p. 245), it is without question a statement on the pragmatic violence of the Indian state.

It is possible to empathize with the editors when they explain the logic of the widely disparate work presented in this volume as a "rich diversity of themes and regions" which are "best surveyed in a rough chronological order" (p. 6). Yet, the unfulfilled promise of a perspective on South Asia—all papers except one are on India—is a little difficult to forgive.

Usha Ramanathan is a professional law researcher and works in the fields of law and poverty. She has written and published articles on displacement, child labour, water law, disaster and the law, development, human rights and gender related issues.

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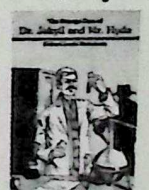
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Whither Indian Federalism?

George Mathew

RETHINKING INDIAN FEDERALISM

Edited by Rasheeduddin Khan

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1997, pp. x + 274, Rs. 350.00

FEDERALISM AND DECENTRALIZATION: CENTRE-STATE
RELATIONS IN INDIA AND GERMANY

Edited by Gert W Kueck, Sudhir Chandra Mathur and Klaus Schindler
Mudrit, New Delhi, 1998, pp. xii+284, Rs. 850.00

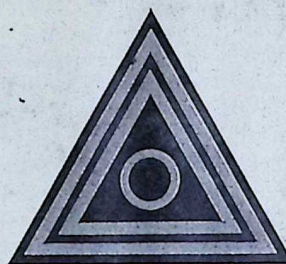
The federal character of India has been at the centre stage of discussions on India's polity ever since we adopted our Constitution in 1950. Not only have constitutional experts and political scientists but also administrators and experts from every area of the social sciences have written extensively on the subject. But the tallest among these in the last several decades is Rasheeduddin Khan. *Rethinking Federalism* was the last work edited by this eminent political scientist before his death in 1996. He made a remarkable contribution in the area of federalism during his long years in the Jawaharlal Nehru University. He then founded the Centre for Federal Studies at Hamdard University in New Delhi. Both the books are collections of essays on the subject but Rasheeduddin Khan's edited work is the result of a 'Study Week' he had organized at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla in 1993 on Federalism in India. The chapters in the book are almost in the order of the nine study sessions of that week-long programme, which were: (1) federalism in India: quest for a new identity, (2) socio-cultural pluralism: problems of tension and co-ordination, (3) working of India's federal system, (4) recasting Centre-State relations: constitutional and political dimensions, (5) patterns of composite culture in different regions of India, (6) economic and financial dimensions of India's federal polity, (7) secular polity: challenges of communalism, (8) dimensions of caste, class and politics, and (9) regionalism and demand for reorganization of states. However three articles by Harish K Puri on multi-cultural societies, Aijazuddin Ahmad on Ecology, Regional Differentiation and Cultural Synthesis, and Pradeep Kumar on Centrifugalism in the Indian Federalism were specially contributed for the volume.

The second book looks at Centre-State relations in India and Germany. It contains papers presented at two seminars in Chennai in 1994 and 1996 under the initiative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and in cooperation with the Max Mueller Bhavan, Chennai, Madras Institute of Development

Studies, *The Hindu* and *Frontline* as well as the Satyamurti Centre for Democratic Studies.

While "What is Federalism?" by Franz Gress; "Indian Federalism and its Discontents: A Review" by Rajeev Dhavan and Geetanjali Goel and "Federalism in Action: The German Experience" by Hartmut Perschau are papers presented at seminars in Johannesburg in 1992 and 1996, the three papers by German scholars—Joachim Jens Hesse, Christian Starck and Klaus P. Fiedler on various aspects of German federalism are reprints from journals and occasional papers. These two books in more than 30 essays look in depth into the highly debated subject of federalism with reference to India. Although most of these papers were written in the first half of the decade based on contemporary developments in the country, they have lasting value as rich reference works for theory building, policy decisions and further research. Several contributors have included valuable data on India's pluralism, diversity and basic statistics about the Union and the States. It should be mentioned here, however, that some tables are based on data gathered in the 1981 Census. These works also wake us up from our complacency in believing that "anyhow the Republic of India is a stable polity and nothing would happen to shatter its unity" (Khan, p.2) in spite of the serious developments in Punjab, Kashmir, the North-Eastern States or Tamil Nadu. Considering the tensions between the Centre and federating units as well as between unity and manifold diversities, India presents a unique case of federation—a dialectical amalgam of apparent opposites or the 'perpetuation of both union and non-centralisation'. Since we are administering a continent as a single country this process gives rise to numerous tensions and contradictions, and with no model to emulate, in the words of Rasheeduddin Khan, "India has to reconstruct itself as a new polity by its own vision and political courage". This is an evolutionary process. It raises the fundamental question: Where is Indian federalism heading to? What is to be done?

RETHINKING INDIAN FEDERALISM



Edited by
RASHEEDUDDIN KHAN

The two books under review attempt to give answers to these basic questions.

The three main challenges to our efforts to build a new federal polity as identified by Professor Khan are: "(i) inadequate distribution of goods and services, resulting in economic disparity and rampant poverty, (ii) persistence of socio-economic inequality between and within the rural and the urban segments of the people, (iii) political populism and political exploitation by competing parties and groups by pandering to divisive and violent communal, caste and regional sentiments." Unless deliberate action plans are taken to solve these basic issues, the attempts to build a federal structure coalescing India's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-caste, multi-lingual and multi-regional population will prove to be a futile exercise. The eminent sociologist T.K. Oommen in his theoretical approach argues that in India these problems persist because we treat the State and Nation as coterminous, and the statist hijack the nation in the interests of a section of the people. "The state-nation coterminality is not an empirical fact but a distorted vision or an ideological preference," says Professor Oommen (p.40). Therefore, according to him, it is necessary to unambiguously recognize both the specificity and linkages between the state, nation and ethnicity to build an authentic federal nation. A definite move was taken towards creating an authentic federal nation when all local government institutions—panchayats and municipalities—were brought under Part IX of the Constitution. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, operational since April-June 1993, have brought about radical changes in India's federal structure. By defining the panchayats and municipalities as "Institutions of self-government" the Cons-

titution has recognized another tier of governance at district level and below in addition to the union and states. Unfortunately, the Central and state level political leaders or the bureaucracy at the top level have not recognized this fact with its full ramifications for India's federal structure. Its full implications for that structure must be debated and recognized without any delay. Neither of these books have given adequate attention to this major development.

However, Rajeev Dhavan and Geetanjali Goel's paper on Indian Federalism and its Discontents in *Federalism and Decentralization* deals with it though briefly. Being an eminent constitutional lawyer Dhavan is convinced that the panchayats and municipalities are a 'New Third Tier of Federalism' having impact on the general administrative arrangements, with radical changes in the system of command control and centralized planning. He is convinced that it will affect the federal system in the country. A veteran of the Indian Administrative Service, V. Ramachandran, and a doyen among India's political thinkers, S. Guhan in their contributions raise questions related to the status of panchayati raj and its implementation in the country. The critical question yet to be answered is when Delhi is not decentralizing to the states, why should states decentralize to the local bodies? Guhan puts it succinctly: "The politicians in Delhi are enlightened and are shedding tears for decentralization. . . just as Delhi does not want to decentralize to the state governments and wants to pack them up whenever they refuse to toe the Centre, it is totally understandable that the state governments too do the same with the local bodies" (p.221).

Although India has its own uniqueness it has to learn from other countries as well. In this context the paper 'Local Self-Government in Germany, The Self-Administration of Cities, Towns and Counties' by Klaus P. Fiedler (first published in 1993) is insightful. Local Government as an expression of civic freedom has a long and strong tradition in Germany going back to the middle ages. Local self-government in Germany is credited with laying the foundations of national reconstruction after the devastation of World War II. Fiedler writes: "local self-government, in a simple way, gives the citizen scope for an almost day-to-day co-determination and control whether it be conversation with the local councillors, access to zoning building plans or insights into communal finances. Thus, towns and local governments, in a sense are the state's smallest political cells whose independent and democratic functioning is a

'A Man of Considerable Ability'

S.K. Singh

"GP THE MAN AND HIS WORK"

Edited by H.Y. Sharada Prasad

New Age International, 1998, pp. 385, Rs. 500.00

GP



The Man and His Work

Edited by H.Y. Sharada Prasad

This is an unostentatious, useful collection of gracious essays about a man of dignity and wisdom.

The first of these, appropriately, is an essay by the President, K.R. Narayanan. Its title "A Quiet Rebel" sums it all. Ambassador Parthasarathi, affectionately known as G.P., even to his own grandsons, was a gentle individual, with a pervasive presence. Nehru once called him "a man of considerable ability". He had pride in India's past and faith in the nation's future. India, he believed, must attain greatness, internationally and internally, by eschewing exclusivity of mind, spirit, or social architecture. GP was both a liberal and a revolutionary.

This book has been edited by H.Y. Sharada Prasad with sensitivity and skill. The tributes at the memorial meeting held in New Delhi in August 1995 soon after GP passed away; the tributes paid at another memorial meeting held in London, and led by the former President, R. Venkataraman; essays in appreciation written by some of GP's friends, admirers and collaborators; and a few selected speeches and writings by GP himself, have been compiled so as to provide the reader an impressionistic picture of GP's personality as a human being, public functionary, diplomat and negotiator, educationist and thinker.

In his life, GP was able to interact closely with a large number of vibrant and interesting personalities—Nehru, Ho Chi Minh, Mao tse Tung, U Thant, Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher, many of whom he could call personal friends, had he been a name dropper. And he lived and functioned during a period in which both India and Asia were evolving rather rapidly and vibrantly.

Some of the more valuable pieces here have been contributed by S. Balakrishnan, Adviser to the Union Home Ministry who assisted GP in his negotiations regarding Kashmir, with Sheikh Abdullah talks with the Mizoram leadership leading to the Mizoram Accord. The two pieces contributed by the Sri Lankan Tamil leaders, Siva Sithambaram and Nilam Tiruchilvam provide a wealth of valuable material on the Indo-Sri Lanka negotiations. A.K. Damodaran's "Foreign Policy Planning and Indian Experience" and H.Y. Sharada Prasad's "During the Indira Gandhi Years" are essays that connect GP's life and times with larger concepts and themes of that era. GP's own speeches reproduced here, unfortunately appear somewhat dated. These were meant for specific occasions, each with a specific purpose, in an era that has passed into history a little too quickly. Many of the concepts of twenty years ago, are no longer relevant and vibrant in a world that has become so comprehensively altered.

All in all, this is an interesting volume, about an interesting negotiator and political thinker, who possessed both grit and humility.

In his life, GP was able to interact closely with a large number of vibrant and interesting personalities—Nehru, Ho Chi Minh, Mao tse Tung, U Thant, Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher, many of whom he could call personal friends, had he been a name dropper. And he lived and functioned during a period in which both India and Asia were evolving rather rapidly and vibrantly. Colonialism was retreating. The Cold War was tapering off. Most of his contemporaries were, however, unable to see how close we were to the end of the old order. GP, in personal discussions, used to show an awareness of the changes that were impending, and were soon to lead to a major sea-change in the world he and we had known. During his time GP had an impact on a number of evolving situations and succeeded in leaving an imprint of his wisdom and dynamic thinking on some of India's policies.

Having served as Chairman of the International Control Commission in Cambodia and thereafter in Vietnam,

FEDERALISM AND DECENTRALISATION Centre-State Relations in India and Germany

Edited by
Gert W. Kaeck
Sudhir Chandra Mathur
and
Klaus Schmitter

MUDRIT

as India's Ambassador to China in the 1958–61 period, he was able to observe several facets of the evolving internal, political developments in China (mainly the Cultural Revolution), and the burgeoning of ideological and political tensions between the two giants of the Communist World, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. GP had the sensitivity to see the adverse impact this development could have on China's bilateral relations with India. GP was able also to see the possibility of China drifting into a physical conflict with India.

He had served as our envoy to Indonesia and Pakistan and later as India's Permanent Representative to the U.N. He had a subtle mind, and was, therefore, aware of the coming changes in the power balance in Asia. He developed great sensitivity also to Japan, getting to know the leaders of the country through numerous visits, when U Thant, the U.N. Secretary-General, named him alternate Chairman for establishing the U.N. International University in Tokyo. GP thus became uniquely equipped to comprehend the emerging and evolving Asian power balance.

It is a book that will educate discriminating readers about how India's international relationships have evolved between the era of nonalignment and today's period of globalization. GP was one of those who formed universal values, and did not yield to the greed and consumerism which many countries in today's world accept.

S.K. Singh, a member of the Indian foreign Service, was Foreign Secretary (1989–90) and has served on the boards of important international organizations and writes on foreign policy issues in the media.

State Provokes, Market Reacts

T C A Srinivasa-Raghavan

THE TROUBLE WITH CAPITALISM: AN ENQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES OF GLOBAL FAILURE

By Harry Shutt

Zed Books, 1998, pp. 238

A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO GLOBALIZATION OF FINANCE

By Kavaljit Singh

Madhyam Books, 1998, pp. 187, Rs. 120

One of the established features of human affairs is that if you predict something for long enough, there will come a time when your predictions come true, it being simply a matter of reiteration and patience. This warning is necessary because, by the sheerest chance, both of the above books have been published at a time when the gravest fears are being expressed about a global slump, possibly even of the sort that overcame the world from 1929 to 1934. Cassandras are rushing about triumphantly with a I-told-you-so look on their faces while apologists defensively hiss from the sidelines that a Great Depression-type calamity is not round the corner.

Harry Shutt belongs to the group which has been warning about the excesses of capitalism, especially of the new, global variety. For those who have followed the debate sympathetically for the last two decades, Shutt's main appeal lies in the way he has marshalled his arguments. Whether one agrees with him or not is not the point. He has presented his case in a persuasive manner and the lay reader, should he be wondering what all the fuss is about, could do worse than to read this book. He will get a perspective which has gone out of fashion. Only, he should bear in mind that this is a rather distorted perspective.

The core of Shutt's argument is that the enormous encouragement given to private capital in recent times, coupled with its natural irresponsibility towards social issues, has created an unstable and inequitable world. The gradual withdrawal of the state from the public stage, says Shutt, has left the world hostage to the greed and caprice of private capital. Add to this the imperatives of modern technology and what has emerged is a potent recipe for global misery and disorder.

As East Asia, Japan, and Russian go on the skids, world commodity prices

fall precipitously and global finance turns skittish, darting nervously from one emerging market to another (when it is not seeking the safe haven of US Treasury bonds, that is), Shutt's formulation seems to be not just right but prophetic as well. After all, it was the flight of short-term capital from Thailand last July that led to the Thai crisis which then led to the Indonesian one, which led to the Korean and the Malaysian ones. Then Japan went under, followed by Russia a few weeks ago.

It is natural in these circumstances that a scapegoat be found. International capital and its tendency to take flight easily serve that purpose very well. More than anything else, as President Mahathir has shown, it can be used to draw attention away from the host-government's own failures. Never mind the fact that Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian firms had borrowed recklessly, that the Korean government had no clue of the extent of short term debt and that the Japanese banking system is enough to put even the Indian one to shame. Never mind, too, the fact that the if China had not devalued its currency so aggressively, the East Asians would not have gone under. Never mind all this, just blame it on the symptom. Indeed, so strong is the circumstantial evidence against global capital that even someone as eminent as James Tobin, the Nobel-winning economist, has been talking of a sand-in-the-wheels solution to slow down the mobility of international financial capital.

Not that Shutt has ignored the foibles of governments. He is fully aware of them but his thesis is simply that the nature of global international capitalism is such that, far from acting to dampen the naturally degenerate tendencies of governments, it exacerbates them. When taken by itself, this too sounds right. But it suffers from the usual flaw of all statist arguments: it lets govern-

ments and politicians off too lightly. For it can be argued equally convincingly that it is the actions of wayward governments that frighten international capital and if governments would only behave responsibly, global finance would not be so volatile.

It is also not easy to approve of Shutt's prescriptions for a new order. He says that once it is established that the maximization of profits can no longer be a basis for allocation of resources it follows, among other things, that:

- Mechanisms for limiting the return on capital ... must be established,
- The State must guarantee private investors against loss of take over the ownership of enterprises,
- The stability of the financial system is a public good.

These and other prescriptions come at the end of the book and are so utterly confused, both in terms of concepts and in terms of practicability—how do you cut the fiscal deficit and still guarantee state pensions to a growing number of old persons?—that one is left wondering whether the effort to read the whole book was worth the while. Then, as one reflects on it, the real problem becomes evident: Shutt has tried to write a political and an economic treatise at the same time, without bothering to keep the essential principles of either political theory or economics in firm view at all times. The result, to say the very least, is most disappointing.

One final point: India has done most of the things that Shutt thinks ought to be done. As a result, it has been saved the embarrassments that have befallen East Asia and Russia. But, as a result, it

has also remained desperately poor. Indeed, even at this moment India is following a policy that favours stability rather than growth.

Clearly, the choice is a stark one—do you go for rapid growth and take the risks that are inherent in it as the East Asians did or do you go for stability with low growth even if it means prolonging poverty as it has in India? India has opted for the latter course time and again. But who is to judge that it has acted wisely?

Kavaljit Singh's book is of the same genre as Shutt's but it is wrapped differently. Instead of seeking to find long-winded explanations to fairly straightforward issues, it gives simple answers to complex issues. That is its chief merit. The most interesting chapter, in the current context, is the one which asks: India will go the East Asian way. At least, it would have been if Singh had volunteered some definite answers.

Instead, he is content to warn against financial liberalization because he says that if India does liberalize too rapidly it will almost certainly go the East Asian way. What he forgets is that it went that way in 1991 also, well before liberalization had started. The fault, it would seem, lies not in our stars but in ourselves.

On balance, though, the warnings contained in these two books do deserve to be taken seriously by citizens, if only because it will educate them. But they also need to be told that when it comes to assigning fault between the State and the Market, the evidence against the former is quite overwhelming. Reason: the State provokes, the Market only reacts.

T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan is with the Business Standard.

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Pitfalls of Chasing Mirages

Nalini Nayak

THE GLOBALIZATION OF POVERTY

By Michel Chossudovsky

Distributed in India by the Other India Bookstore, Goa, 1997, pp. 280, Rs. 175.00

This study by Michel Chossudovsky is about the global spread of the capitalist system, this spread having been aided and abetted by the Bretton Woods Institutions. This global expansion has followed certain well-established patterns of development and growth of the capitalist system, which, starting with Marx, many other critics of the capitalist system had talked about. Lenin had talked about imperialism as the highest stage of capitalist development. Lenin's theory of imperialism had talked about the need of the capitalist system to constantly expand into hitherto unconquered territory, particularly after the spread of monopolies hinders the possibilities of further growth within the islands of capitalist development, the USA and Europe. For the continuing growth and prosperity of these islands of capitalism, the system had to make use of the cheap labour and resources of the Third World countries. The penetration and opening up of these additional Third World economies, such as markets for the multinational corporations, and as sources made pos-

sible because of the links established between the developed capitalist economies and their erstwhile colonies, during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. The end of World War II saw immense changes taking place in the world, both politically and economically. Politically we saw the end of the colonial system in many countries. This was also a time when socialist ideals and ideology were ascendent, and it was a time of crisis for the capitalist world. It was a time when aspirations for growth and development particularly to tackle the problem of grinding poverty led to experiments with different development models in different parts of the world.

The combination of the need of western developed countries for a global spread of their MNCs, together with the aspirations of particularly the upper and middle classes (the ruling classes in the now independent Third World countries), for the affluent lifestyles of the western world, induced many of the Third World countries to adopt a policy of "opening up" in the eighties and nineties, as against "closed

economy" models, which many had earlier tried to follow. The earlier models, many influenced by socialist ideals, had been based on the idea of active government intervention for bringing about economic development. Unfortunately, given the vested interests of the ruling classes many of the countries fell into external and internal debt traps with high fiscal and revenue deficits. Many of these countries in a situation of balance of payments crises, were forced to turn to the IMF and World Bank for assistance. It was in this crisis situation for the Third World countries that the Bretton Woods institutions were able to administer their favoured medicine for the economic ills of these countries. That this medicine also served the interests of the First World was perhaps incidental!

Michel Chossudovsky has tried to show to what extent the prosperity of the First World rests on the poverty of the Third World. The "stabilization" policies thrust on the Third World governments—forcing governments to withdraw from the social sectors, reduce subsidies, withdraw essential government support to important sectors of the economy—all in the name of allowing a free market economy to develop, results in the impoverishment of large sections of the population.

The book by Chossudovsky is divided into five parts. The first part studies the impact of the policy menu on the spread of poverty in Third World countries. The instruments of control (the loan conditionalities) used by the

IMF and World Bank to force the Third World governments to accept and follow policy recommendations of the international institutions. This, in fact, results in the development of the "Cheap Labour Economies", the benefits of this impoverishment of the working classes of the Third World going to the First World in the form of cheap products.

Parts II, III, IV and V are actual case studies from all over the world, starting with Sub-Saharan Africa. He looks at the two recent crisis areas (Somalia and Rwanda) and tries to analyse the real reasons for the famine, and the economic genocide in Rwanda, which came about as a direct consequence of the IMF "Shock Therapy" and resulted in the destruction of an economy based on the export of coffee.

He looks at other examples of the IMF "Shock Therapy" where the same menu of devaluation (to cope with balance of payments crises) and macro-economic stabilization policies has been applied—South and South-east Asia, Latin America, the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. In each case the IMF medicine has resulted in the impoverishment of large sections of the population. The recent crisis in the "Asian Tigers" no doubt would have resulted in the addition of several "case studies" to the ones which are already a part of this book.

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Environmental History?: Whatever Happened to Colonialism

Rohan D'Souza

NATURE AND THE ORIENT: THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY
OF SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Edited by Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp.1036, Rs. 1250.00

ECOLOGY, CLIMATE AND EMPIRE: THE INDIAN LEGACY IN GLOBAL
ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY 1400-1940

Edited by Richard H. Grove

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp. 237, Rs. 395

Undoubtedly, the impact of environmental degradation on the entire web of life evokes some of the most critical global concern in the twilight years of this century. Not only is the scale of the present 'ecological crisis' unprecedented in human history but it has also engendered qualitatively new forms of resource scarcities and inequities. Though human abuse of the environment has ancient roots with even whole civilizations being virtually extinguished because of unsustainable practices, the current crisis is unique in its global dimension and for the threat it now poses to several complex and fragile, ecological processes that sustain the totality of life on earth.

The irreversible erosion of some of the basic environmental infrastructure of the planet is sharply skewed in its impact with the poorest and the marginalised populations bearing the brunt. The main beneficiaries of this global political economy that facilitates this unequal distribution of the burdens of environmental degradation have, not surprisingly, sought to privilege their diagnosis and version of the problem above that of the actual truth. Consequently, the cutting edge of 'environmentalism' has been selectively directed against 'demographic pressures' or at preserving pristine biotically rich and diverse zones in the tropics, without engaging decisively with the problems of unsustainable consumption patterns or challenging the sanctity of 'private property'.

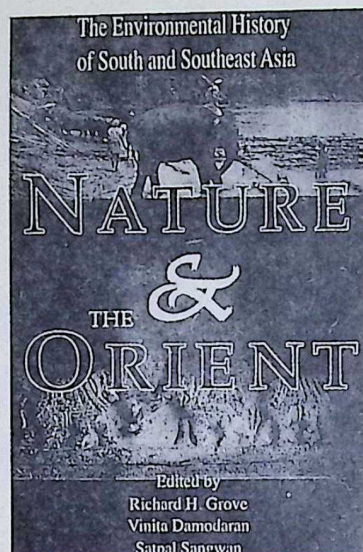
The origins of today's ecological crisis can in fact be largely traced to the rise, growth and consolidation of capitalism, which attained a significant maturity and intensity by the early half of the nineteenth century. The unfurling of capitalism not only resulted in the drastic reorganization of the environment in the core regions of its emergence but more significantly reshaped

the ecologies of its colonies in the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In its drive to acquire raw materials to feed its industry and then later to capture markets, capitalism soon battered the 'Chinese walls' of pre-capitalist formations and debilitated and shattered 'natural economies' until it reordered the world in its own image. To quote Marx:

"The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?"¹

Capitalism, however, must not be conceived off as a single homogenous unchanging system; rather it was and is an evolving context that constantly revolutionises productive forces, social relations and its technological basis. Consequently, the different stages of capitalism, never distinguishable in an absolute sense but by dominant features, subjected the natural world to varying pressures at different periods of time. Similarly the modern colony—the subordinate complement of the capitalist economy—underwent changes linked to the altering forms of surplus expropriation and the manner in which the transfer of tribute/surplus to the metropolitan centre was enabled. The natural world of the colonies, therefore, was impacted upon in

¹ K. Marx & F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p.48.



varying intensities throughout the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century.

It is in the backdrop of this complex of events and conjunctures that the two books under review should be situated. *Nature and the Orient* and *Ecology, Climate and Empire* are timely additions to the growing and necessary studies on the history of resource (ab)use and the as yet limited explorations into the nature of the colonial impact on the environment. The former comprises 31 essays, spanning a range of studies on forests, mining, attitudes to the environment, hunting etc. in South and Southeast Asia; while the latter is a relatively modest collection of Grove's essays elaborating upon his now familiar perspective.²

For our purpose, however, it is, necessary to whittle down the review of the several essays in *Nature and the Orient* to a manageable theme—forestry. This theme is covered in 18 essays, with only two of them dealing with the pre-colonial period. Thus, *Nature and the Orient* affords us the possibility of assessing an important aspect of the colonial impact over a vast region essentially through the turns and twists of colonial forest policy and the strategies for its management and control. Not unexpectedly, the essays range across a spectrum of positions.

At one end can be placed Ravi Rajan's study of what he terms as the tradition of Continental forestry and its determining influence on forest policies in colonial India. Continental forestry arose in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century in response to the new industrial demands of the state. Through a series of initiatives the practitioners of Continental forestry evolved an entirely new regime of control over the forests, which now privileged and legitimated

² See R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, OUP, Delhi, 1995.

the needs of industry over that of the subsistence needs of agriculturists. So, France, compelled by similar exigencies and the need to overcome a sharp fall in timber that was vital for shipbuilding, imbibed and imitated the German experience and set up their own specialist school on forestry at Nancy. In time Continental forestry effectively replaced forms of communal forest management, limited the access of communities to forage, pasturage, gleaning and coppicing and most significantly turned forests into an aspect of the national infrastructure to be used primarily for the benefit of the state.

Ravi Rajan then contends that the technocratic elite of forest managers that arose in the course of developing a new regime of forest control became an interest group of sorts, with their own agenda. In due course foresters from colonial India who were imbued and schooled in this tradition unhesitatingly transplanted the ideas of Continental forestry into the Indian subcontinent. In effect, while the specific political economy of Europe determined and shaped its forest policy, in colonial India a community of technocrats and professionals trained in Continental forestry set the agenda for 'colonial forestry.' Thus, the colonial state did not have a distinct policy towards forest control that was borne out of its own unique and particular requirements. By implication colonial economic and political imperatives did not impinge on 'colonial forestry'.

This line of reasoning is in comfortable agreement with the perspective advanced by Richard Grove, who has argued that colonial forest policies were a strong conservationist agenda was essentially dictated and formulated by groups of professional scientists. While we will debate the validity of this claim in a later section of the essay (when we discuss *Ecology, Climate and Empire*), it is important to highlight that this view basically dismisses or underplays the agency of colonialism. Secondly, it attributes a decisive influence to the realm of ideas while simultaneously diluting the implications of material processes.

Practices and developments on the ground, however, convey a very different, if not opposite, impression. In the first half of the nineteenth century much of the East India Company's attention was directed at securing teak for shipbuilding. The west coast stretching from Gujarat in the North to the rich evergreen Malabar forests in the south was particularly marked for such extraction. In the district of North Canara the early Marine and Revenue departments of the Company were chiefly concerned with securing a continuous supply of teak for the Bombay dock-yards.

RONMENT

Marlene Buchy). By the mid-nineteenth century the emphasis shifted towards meeting the demands of the fast-expanding railway network. Teak and certain kinds of junglewood were now attracted for railway sleepers. Throughout this period the limit of exploitability was determined not by objective botanical considerations but in response to the needs of the market. Similarly, deciduous patches in the wet evergreen forests of the western ghats, which abounded in teak, blackwood, catechu (*Acacia catechu*) and kino (*Uncaria tomentosa*), were systematically worked to supply British shipbuilding, military cantonments, factories and the inevitable railways (M.D. Subash Chandran). In the Central Provinces as well, with its then significant reserves of teak (*Tectona grandis*) and Sal (*Shorea robusta*), the needs of railway construction hastened the denudation of some of the largest deciduous forests in the subcontinent (Mahesh Rangarajan). Such unremitting timber extraction, predominantly for railway sleepers, was also carried out in Chotanagpur (Vinita Damodaran) and in the emerald island of Ceylon (Eric Meyer).

Ironically, it was precisely the hunt for timber and the critical need to secure sources of its supply that provoked the colonial state to initiate a regime for forest conservation and commercially oriented silviculture. By 1855, with the appointment of Dietrich Brandis as the first Inspector General of Forests in India and the subsequent elaboration of the forest bureaucracy, a new orientation acquired momentum—'Scientific Forestry'. The idea of reforestation, however, was not necessarily resisted on the ground. Forest conservation in its earliest incarnation did not significantly change the emphasis on revenue generation or compromise the needs of the colonial state i.e. it was not merely about saving trees from the axe but often about the appropriation of forest resources for the government' (Mahesh Rangarajan).

The most substantial impact of 'scientific forestry' was transmitted into local communities which depended on forests for their various needs. Forests were now demarcated into three classes—Reserved, Protected and Unclassified. While in the first type the local populace was entirely excluded from timber growth, in the remaining two they were often grudgingly allowed circumscribed access. In the Deccan belt in Gujarat, scientific forestry operated to rigorously deny local communities access to forests far more systematically than earlier conservation ideas and practices in the region.

All the working plans for forest management were directed at denuding the protected forests while conserving timber in the reserved forests. In the long run several areas in the Dangs became virtual teak monocultures (Ajay Scaria). In the Western ghats from the 1860s onwards pressure was mounted to stop shifting cultivation (Kumri), a practice which was presumed to threaten teak supplies. In 1890, with the exception of a few villages, Kumri was virtually ended thereby undermining the livelihood of a large number of cultivators. While working plans of the forest administration increasingly regimented local access to fuelwood, wild fruit, pasture and other forest produce, the extraction of timber and hardwood species for export was sustained at high levels (M.D. Subash Chandran).

The importance of forest produce for the local economy cannot be overstated. According to one account in Chota Nagpur:

"21 species of seed and fruits of 45 uncultivated trees... were used as food in addition to 34 trees the leaves of which were used as vegetables and 18 species of edible roots... 97 forest products used as medicines, 28 used as oils and gums, 17 used as dyes and 33 creepers or barks of trees used as rope fibres (p.857)."

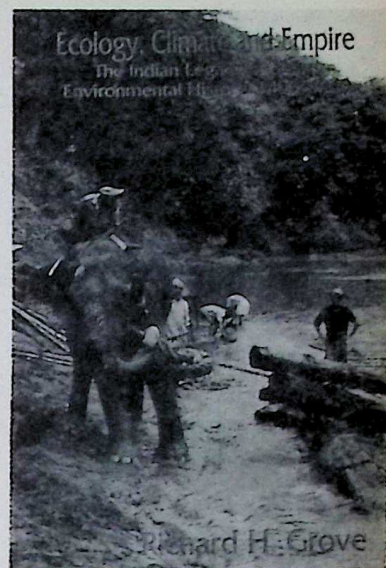
In Chota Nagpur, the erosion of forest rights in conjunction with the denudation of the forests, not unexpectedly, became important factors in causing the famine conditions of 1897 in the region (Vinita Damodaran). Tensions naturally flared up and various forms of protests against colonial forest policies intensified in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Indra Munshi Saldana's essay documents several such agitations in the Thana district (Maharashtra), provoked clearly by the need of the local populace to increase their access to the forests. While the colonial state was compelled to respond to such popular pressure and renegotiate or even retreat on instances, its revenue imperative and economic agenda was seldom severely compromised. Secondly, 'local communities' and the 'local populace' were themselves now reconstituted by the colonial context. New forms of property, the corrosive effects of the market and deeper circuits of trade were violently churning the old social order small cultivators, poor peasants and tribals. Thus, forest loss did not impact uniformly on the 'local community' nor did the occasional easing off of the demands of the colonial state benefit the various strata equally. The worst sufferers inevitably were the tribals and small cultivators. The new social order and imbricating

moneylenders, landlords and contractors atop moreover defined itself vis-à-vis the depleted forests in new and often unsustainable ways (Indra Munshi Saldana & Vinita Damodaran).

Two caveats are in order. First, despite the obviously enormous needs for timber and the fairly well documented extraction agendas of the colonial state in India, the evidence of forest loss is essentially qualitative.³ Upto at least 1880, no accurate or even acceptable figures can be advanced to account for actual forest loss. For several reasons this complicates the study of colonial forest history. While the non-existence of reliable statistics for most of the nineteenth century is certainly a limitation, the elaboration of a colonial forest bureaucracy from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and the specific ends to which it was made to work is fairly well documented. Consequently, circumstantial evidence of forest loss within a valid framework can still enable studies to trace a pattern of colonial intent and strategy. Second, the colonial obsession for timber, correspondingly slanted the nature of the documentation. Thus, a vast majority of the forest products generally listed under Minor Forest Produce (MEP), escaped systematic scrutiny. It is probable that MEP, especially where mixed forests existed, did not become a source of contest in many regions (Richard Tucker). The teak-centred attitude moreover, propelled the Forest and civil administration to develop classificatory systems that degraded all forms of forest activities which they considered harmful to timber growth. Shifting cultivation especially was widely criticized and for a considerable period held to be destructive to the forest ecology. M.D. Subash Chandran's essay on Kumri argues the reverse and suggests that shifting cultivation in the western ghats was not only not a vagrant form of cultivation but was evolved as a form of land use to circumvent major problems of tropical agriculture like soil erosion, low nutrient status and pest pressure.

Clearly, the evidence in the majority of the essays suggest that revenue agendas determined colonial forest policy and economic exigencies rather than ideology dictated forest practices. In effect, colonial forestry can more insightfully be studied as an aspect of colonial history (Mahesh Rangarajan & Marlene Buchy).⁴

The above proposition, however, stands in contrast to Grove's general line of argument in *Ecology, Empire and Climate*. The collection of essays in the



volume explore colonial 'discourses' on deforestation, climate change and conservation between 1500–1940. According to Grove the European encounter with the environment in the colonies in the earliest years of mercantilistic expansion resulted in the proliferation of a school of experts who carefully monitored and documented processes of ecological degradation especially in the tropics. Termed as 'desiccationists'—a set of ideas characterized by the assertion that there was a causal connection between forest depletion and phenomena like droughts or soil erosion—these precursors to the modern day environmentalists soon translated their alarmist perceptions into a veritable programme for conservation.

In time, with the gradual accumulation of details on tropical environments and more significantly on 'indigenous and traditional' precepts on resource management the desiccationists, by the early decades of the nineteenth century began to shift the levers of colonial state policy. Official fears of famine and agrarian failure had by then already been stoked to make most of the colonial governments peculiarly amenable to implementing conservation agendas. In sum, the principal motive for colonial forestry was the government's concern about the consequences of environmental degradation, which it concluded could also snowball into anxieties of rule.

Grove while thus underplaying the implications of colonial revenue and economic imperatives on forestry argues that ideas on 'conservation' were a determining influence. It is perhaps of some significance that much of Grove's reasoning stems from the nature of the sources he has chosen to consult. It is probable that in the rarefied discourses of 18th and 19th century scientific ideas and pronounce-

³ I owe this insight to Bela Malik.

⁴ Also see Ramchandra Guba, *Unquiet Woods*, OUP, Delhi, 1989.

ments, the material foundations of colonialism appeared obscure. Events on the ground, however, as documented in forest and civil administration directives and in the malodorous tedium and minutiae of their functioning, reveal that colonial forestry was substantially oriented towards meeting its revenue targets and other needs of the state.

Secondly, the ability of a group of professionals to play upon the 'fears' of the colonial state and steer it against the interests of 'short term private capital' raise very critical questions not only about the nature of the colonial state but more fundamentally about the equilibrium of forces that sustained it. Undoubtedly, the colonial state was the best agency for implementing colonial policies, but it did not and could not have functioned in an economic and political vacuum. Moreover how 'short term' was the need for railway sleepers?

The political weight of economic forces also cannot be underestimated. In Ceylon, to take one example, despite almost several decades of studies exposing the deleterious effects of plantation economies on the soil, the government could respond with measures only in 1931 when a depression created a slump in plantation products and thereby weakened the planters (Eric Meyer's essay in *Nature and the Orient*). The rhetoric of conservation therefore must be distinguished from the substance of state policy.

It is the failure to explain the phenomenon of colonialism that similarly clouds the editors' introduction in *Nature and the Orient*. For one, Mughal, British, French and Dutch 'imperialisms' are lumped together. While one need not debate here the differences between pre-capitalist forms of state and those that were assembled through the processes of colonialism, it nevertheless is important to underline that the two involved very distinct forms of property and rule.⁵ Formal similarities in areas of forest management do not necessarily constitute continuities.⁶ No doubt the nature of colonial rule was complex and the narrative of a pre-colonial golden age needs to be imploded. Having set this agenda, why construct a new orthodoxy of continuities?

Rohan D'Souza has just submitted his Ph.D. thesis at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

⁵ Marx & Engels, *On Colonialism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976. Irfan Habib, 'Colonization of the Indian Economy' in *idem* (ed.), *Essays in Indian History*, Tulika, Delhi, 1995. And also see A.K. Bagchi, *Towards a Correct Reading of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism*, in P. Patnaik (ed.), *Lenin and Imperialism*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1986.

⁶ This is argued in the section on forest settlements in Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Colonial State and Agrarian Society' in S. Bhattacharya and R. Thapar (ed.), *Situating Indian History*, OUP, Delhi, 1986.

Debate on the Future of India's Forests

Mahesh Rangarajan

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INDIAN FORESTS

Edited by Roger Jeffery

Manohar Books, New Delhi, 1998, pp.188, Rs.400.00

GREENING AT THE GRASSROOTS, ALTERNATIVE FORESTRY STRATEGIES IN INDIA

Edited by Eva Cheung Robinson

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp.144, Rs.250(cloth), Rs.145(paper)

The debate on the future of India's forests is now as lively in the ranks of academia as among activist groups, policy makers and the media. One of the refreshing aspects of this development is that there is a profusion of studies on various facets of the relationship between forests and people. In the social sciences, this has expanded beyond the study of forest-based movements and government policies to the wider patterns of land ownership and utilization and the multiple ways in which culture interacts with nature. The one common thread is that there is now little doubt that what the forest or a forest means to one person or group of persons is radically different from what it means to another. The clash of will is itself a major force in reshaping not only the extent of forest cover but who controls access to it. Barely a decade after the publication of Ram Guha's work on Uttarakhand, the cluster of works now at hand throws light on the regional specificity of the ecological question. Keeping these particular features of different regions of the subcontinent is vital to get past sweeping generalisations.

Eva Cheung Robinson's work is particularly useful in this light. Her focus is on the success and failure of social forestry schemes in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. India's efforts at reforestation have largely been concerned with meeting urban or industrial demand for fuel or raw materials. But by the early 1980s, there were efforts to remedy this by concentrating considerable effort and energy at meeting rural needs, in particular those of the rural poor. Of course fashions in the development set and among bureaucrats change with the times. Today it is not social forestry but joint forest management that is the rage of the day. Yet, knowing when and under what conditions the former can or cannot work is more essential than is often acknowledged. Robinson estimates that the World Bank and other donor agencies channeled over 900,000 US dollars for social forestry between 1980 and 1991.

The problem lay in the very objectives of the programme, which sought only to complement the existing regimes of production forestry on woodlands controlled by the Forest Department. In effect, the imperial legacy of forestry oriented for a narrow sector was sought to be reinforced rather than subverted.

The choice of Andhra Pradesh is significant. The state has the largest spread of forests after Madhya Pradesh. The Forest Department controls a vast area of no less than 64,000 square kilometers, much of it Reserved Forest. It has substantial populations of tribals and includes critical if often neglected forests as in the Eastern Ghats. It is notable that Furer von Haimendorf not only worked in the territories of the former Nizam but also helped formulate some of the early schemes that sought to check the destruction of forests while ensuring the amelioration of tribals.

Despite the limitations of the social forestry project as a whole, some voluntary groups were able to utilise the space it provided to reforest some tracts of land: Here, the book is finely balanced, for it shows a keen awareness of both the constraints attendant upon and the potential of such constructive work efforts. The social forestry programme was very much a creature under the direct aegis of the Forest Department as a whole. It was not, in that sense, even a reformist measure. Though over 20 crore seedlings and saplings were distributed to farmers, the species supplied by the nurseries were rarely those desired by villagers. All too often, as in Mahbubnagar, the locale and the species were decided upon by foresters as these were seen as solely 'technical questions'. Yet, the success stories, limited as they were, do give ground for some hope.

In Zaheerabad, women were involved from the very outset, partly because the Conservator was progressive and open-minded. But his work was greatly facilitated by a voluntary group which mobilised opinion. Yet, even here, the ownership rights of the trees



planted under the programme remained unclear. In the absence of clarity to the potential beneficiaries, in this case through tree patta to the women, success will be a distant goal, not a real option. The detailed studies include two sites in the dry region of Rayalseema. This was and is a denuded landscape, bereft of large groves or stands of trees. Each of the voluntary groups involved was different in terms of its origins and interests. In Kadiri, it was under the umbrella of Myrada, an organisation with a commendable record in resettling Tibetan refugees. Micro-level land management and mobilisation of credit were the keys to success. By contrast, the Girijan-Bachward Sangh in a part of Cuddapah was more top-down in its manner of functioning and had to revise its earlier approach. A Gandhian group called Gord took up similar problems in the Guntur district. These three cases show there is a diversity of cultures even among voluntary groups.

Robinson's field level work is of greater interest than the summaries of the debates of 'colonial' knowledge systems. There is ample room, she argues, for a different kind of forestry oriented to subsistence and income generation. The planting of trees useful for fruit, food and savings was common to all the three sites. The key also lay in assessing the worth of trees for the really disadvantaged sections and ensuring they controlled this form of wealth. Women, for instance, often had a scale of priorities that only partially overlapped even with male members of their households.

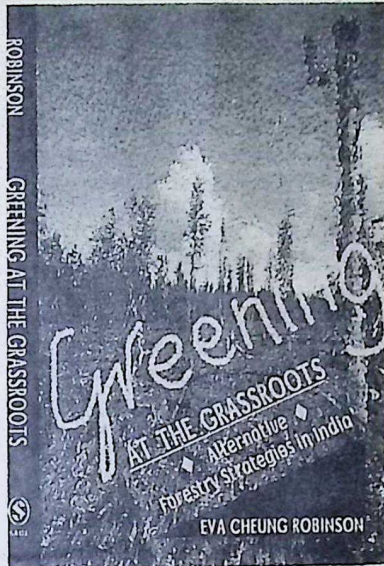
Robinson's work is especially useful due to the meticulous attention to detail. It would have gained immensely had she embellished it with more ecological information on the topography, soil and the kinds of flora that recover when land is closed for biomass extraction.

But this is a significant and insightful study.

Many of the issues touched upon by Robinson are examined in some of the essays in the volume edited by Jeffery. The scope and scale of the book is much wider. It includes two provocative, if brief pieces on the relationship between forests and culture. Dubiansky traces the importance of forest symbolism in Tamil textual sources. There is large corpus of writings of the opposition in classical Sanskrit texts between the worlds of the aranya or forest and that of the grama or village. Tamil sources do not only to opposition but to connections as in the imagery of two forests with distinctly non-Aryan roots, namely Murugan and Valli. Shattilakshya shows how modern Bengali writers from Bankim to Mahasveta Devi

have used the forest both as a metaphor and a setting for their tales. For the former, the forest is a desolate place, the setting for a melancholy love tale and for the latter it is a site of hope due to the uprisings of peoples of the forest. But the volume really picks up pace with the studies of folk religion and its relation to conservation. The sacred groves of the Western Ghats have, for over a quarter century become a symbol and rallying point for many who want to move beyond a static model of protection towards an indigenous and more rooted idea of conservancy. Kalamounds a note of caution, documenting the decline and collapse of many such sacred groves in the Coorg region of Karnataka. While not absolving the foresters from their share of damage, she reminds us how several such groves were denuded when they were under the control of the Revenue Department. Freeman's research on Malabar is more sharply critical of religion-based models of conservation. He clearly maps the ritual and cultural significance of certain practices, which were not, as is sometimes imagined, a homeostatic device to maintain the ecosystem. In fact, many of the local inhabitants of the area welcome the influx of Christian planters because the latter have wiped out large wild animals that were earlier the object of fear.

It is not possible to do justice to all the papers in the book. But a brief mention may still be useful. Linkenbach's is an account of a Garwhal village and the physical use of mountain terrain and the changing cultural significance for the resident. He too warns of how wider economic changes are undermining older bonds with nature. Madsen looks at one of the more contentious conflicts around grazing access rights in the bird sanctuary near Bharatpur in Rajasthan. He shows how there was little unanimity among sci-



entists and officials on banning grazing, but it was nevertheless pushed through resulting in police firings in November, 1982 and the deaths of villagers. Madsen is factually inaccurate in reporting that leopards have been introduced into the Borivili park near Mumbai: they naturally occur and continue to breed in the area in the shadow of the metropolis. What the writer does not tell us about the Bharatpur case is crucial: foresters refused to let scientists from the Bombay Natural History Society conduct experiments in the wetland to measure whether and if cattle grazing was indeed damaging the ecosystem. Madsen's work is one of the few case studies anywhere of conflicts around Protected Areas where the conservation values of wildlife are given top priority. Unlike in the wider case of forest management, the debate around these areas and who ought to control them is still at a nascent stage.

The last two papers are by Potter and Jewitt. The former finds that voluntary groups in Karnataka have been more influential in the implementation stages of Joint Forest Management than in policy making. Until now, the programme itself has been severely limited in scope partly due to the unwillingness of foresters to extend it to much of the land under their control. Jewitt looks at a region well known for forest based and tribal movements. Though hopeful about joint management, she cautions that the process must emanate from the grass roots and not be imposed from above.

The book does succeed in shedding light on what is often 'a battle over which of the possible meanings of the forest is to have priority'. It steers a careful middle ground, illustrating how the government is itself often a house divided and civil society in turn is hardly unified on the forests question. This is even so in areas and among

peoples who are sometimes romantically seen as eco-friendly.

Two caveats are perhaps necessary. There is less in the book than one might have imagined on the importance of the colonial period or on the implications of forest movements and how they have raised afresh the connections between equity and ecology. Secondly, it is perhaps reflective of a larger gap in social science work on ecological questions but one shared by many contributors: they take the social dimension to be so crucial that the sense of the dynamics of nature almost disappears from view. The kinds of regeneration that occur in a particular region and the

conditions under which it can proceed or is hindered from taking place is an issue much more central to the validity or otherwise of many of the papers. It is hardly dealt with adequately. This should not detract from the value of this work. Jeffery hints at how vital it is to distinguish between 'different visions of the forest' and to keep this in mind even when dealing with newly current ideas like joint forest management. Often the latter masks deep and unresolved issues of who will control the forest and for what.

Mahesh Rangarajan is a Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Letter from London

Stephen Moss



Money is an awkward subject for writers. After all, aren't they supposed to be above all that, geniuses living for their art and slowly starving to death in a garret? Serious money means non-serious literature: leave that to Grisham and Clancy, Archer and Danielle Steel.

Well, maybe. There was a celebrated spat in the UK a couple of years ago when Martin Amis switched agents and secured for himself an advance of pounds 500,000 from Harper Collins for his novel, *The Information*. A.S. Byatt, literary grand dame and former Booker Prize winner, announced that this would not do at all: it was shoddy commerce, a prostitution of the writer's art, the triumph of Mammon. Other writers took sides and the battle ended in stalemate.

The issue has been reawakened recently by a clever anthology assembled by the booksellers Waterstone's. They repeated an exercise first undertaken in 1946 by the critic and novelist Cyril Connolly, who asked a selection of prominent authors how much a 'serious writer needed to live on whether this could be earned by writing, what a suitable second occupation would be, whether a writer suffered by undertaking other employment, whether the state should do more for writers, and what advice they would give to aspiring writers.

As the novelist Alain de Botton

points out in his introduction to the new anthology, entitled *The Cost of Letters*, these subjects were of deep and abiding interest to Connolly, who saw money worries as the principal "enemy of promise". Connolly was forever dreaming up notions to alleviate his and other writers' financial woes: "I should like to see a custom introduced of readers who are pleased with a book sending the author some small cash token: anything between half-a-crown and a hundred pounds. Authors would then receive what their publishers give them as a flat rate and their 'tips' from grateful readers in addition."

Connolly's interest in the subject led him to commission a survey for *Horizon*, the literary magazine he edited, of other writers, among them John Betjeman, Robert Graves, George Orwell and Stephen Spender. Orwell was typically to the point. How much does a writer need to live on? (This is 1946, remember.) "I think pounds 10 a week after income tax for a married man, pounds 6 a week for an unmarried man." Can a serious writer earn this sum by writing? "No, I am told that at most a few hundred people in Great Britain earn their living solely by writing books, and most of those are probably writers of detective stories." What is the most suitable second occupation for a writer? "Something non-literary... I can just imagine, for instance, a bank clerk or an insurance agent going home and doing serious work in his evenings, whereas the effort is too much to make if one has already squandered one's energies on semi-creative work such as teaching, broadcasting or composing propaganda for bodies such as the British Council." (Betjeman's preferred second occupation was characteristically delightful: "I would like to be a station-master on a small country branch line—single track.")

Betjeman's succinct reply to the question "how much does a writer need to live on?"—"As much as anyone

else"—is echoed by many current practitioners. Take Jonathan Coe: "At the time of writing, the average yearly income for full-time employment in Great Britain is pounds 19,115. I don't see why writers should expect any less than that. Most of them deserve a good deal more."

Other contributors are more demanding: the biographer Michael Holroyd reckons pounds 70,000 would do, the novelist Will Self plums for 40,000-80,000 pounds. Hilary Mantel is wittily facetious: "In an ideal world, all published writers would be as rich as Croesus. They could then indulge in dissipation and eccentricity on a scale the public has a right to expect... There must be sufficient money for champagne to cheer up friends whose work is rejected, and for postage stamps to return unsolicited manuscripts. To engage the interest of the Sunday papers, it is necessary to build up a big drug habit. Female writers absolutely must not be seen to dress out of Marks & Spencer. Also, writers who venture abroad must always travel first class and stay at the best hotels. Otherwise, they encounter hazards and hardships, write very dull books about them, and become a burden to the spirit."

So, can they earn enough to live as a "serious" writer? Few of the respondents question what is meant by serious here—a subject worth a book in its

own right—but let that pass. The consensus seems to be that you can earn enough, but for how long? Tales of former literary stars now dependent on the hospitality of the Salvation Army abound. Julian Barnes sums it up neatly: "You would have to be exceedingly vain or foolish to set up as a writer and think that your art will sustain you until death. When I started reading seriously, Angus Wilson was one of our most acclaimed literary novelists. By the time I became a writer myself he was a knight. Not long afterwards, I remember being asked to contribute to an emergency fund to help sustain him".

A salutary tale—and an indication that, if nothing else, the Government should consider giving writers tax breaks to help them cover the long, low-earning fallow periods in their careers; their pattern of earning is likely to be more erratic than most. The majority of writers surveyed here are against direct state subsidy—"The state should leave writers alone", says Michael Ignatieff trenchantly—but a more helpful tax regime, along the lines of that which assists writers in Ireland, wins a good deal of support. More money for libraries and an increase in the public lending right fund are also mooted as practical ways to help writers. Arguing that too much mediocre work is produced, Will Self suggests cash payments to authors if they agree

not to write. Well, that principle seems to be acceptable in agriculture...

The most interesting answers are those in response to the question, "What would be the most suitable second occupation for a serious writer?" Many of these writers affect to despise journalism (which doesn't, of course, stop quite a number of them practising it to boost their incomes). Jonathan Coe declares that "Literary journalism... is not good for the soul". Hilary Mantel agrees: "Journalism is convenient. The danger is that you become, as Stevenson said, 'wedded to cheap finish'." One understands what they mean, but the great writers of the 18th century, those founders of the modern novel, managed to be fine journalists and polemicists without it undermining their novelistic endeavours.

So if not journalism, what? Sebastian Faulks reminds us that "Henry Green worked satisfactorily in the family business making lavatory seats, but few such openings exist today". What can he mean? A.S. Byatt advocates gardening—"quiet, physical, thoughtful and interesting", Hilary Mantel suggests becoming a fortune teller or estate agent; Alasdair Gray cautions that "prostitution should be avoided when possible"; and Michael Ignatieff reminds us that "Kafka dreamed of being a waiter at a beach-front restaurant in Tel Aviv". Er, yes, thanks for that thought.

Many of the respondents agree that a non-literary second occupation is better than a para-literary one: Melville was far better off doing a spot of what, runs this line of argument, than say, compiling crosswords for the *New York Times*. "Writers are definitely impoverished by remaining incarcerated in their word-processor garrets," says Beryl Bainbridge. "After a time, one stops meeting or knowing normal people."

That's a fairly common view—that writers should get a life, meet "real" people and try to understand them. It is also rather simplistic and probably wrong-headed. As Melvyn Bragg says, "It depends on the writer. You can construct any case you want by taking models from the past." Michael Holroyd is wonderfully dismissive of the 'get a life' school of literary criticism: "Except possibly for a few sequestered academic writers, we have a perfectly good grasp of the world. We know about love and death, passion and grief simply by being alive." Lucy Ellmann is equally wary of the argument that a second occupation can enrich your writing: "A novelist's time is best spent learning how to write novels or drinking martinis." Always assuming you can afford them, of course.

Stephen Moss is literary editor of the *Guardian*.

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A Saga of Loves and Lusts

Arundhati Ghose

THE DOGS OF JUSTICE

By Nina Sibal

Ravi Dayal, Delhi, 1998,
pp. 320, Rs. 225.00

Nina Sibal's latest offering *The Dogs of Justice* purports to be a legacy to her daughter, a legacy of loves and lusts. Yet the character of the protagonist Shahnaz is most of the time viewed from the outside—the feeling I got on reading the book, which I virtuously and painfully completed, is of a series of puppet shows set against a backdrop of a montage of newspaper clippings from western newspapers about India... the Partition, mixed up with the more recent insurgency in J&K, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Even those characters on which she spends some time, and there are a plethora of them, seem like caricatures, stereotypes, than real people. It has been called a book about passion—to me, there is a difference between passion and everyday humdrum lust. Inconstant bystanders die horrible deaths of Shahnaz, whenever she does appear, appears to want to take the responsibility as a badge of honour to her rather banal sexual relations. Perhaps I am being too harsh, but one expected much more sensitivity from Nina Sibal. To start even with the title—from where does the metaphor emanate? Her identification with a Kashmiri poetess is unconvincing, anyone can identify with anyone, that is of course their freedom of choice, but Habba Khatun sang and died for her love of one man; Shahnaz, daughter of Mr. Hamidkhan, CS (always used as one word) goes to Geneva, is seduced by a Polish Count, over a plate of pastry no less, and loses her virginity. A young Jordanian, who even Shahnaz did not seem to know too well, commits suicide. That's Geneva and, presumably "growing up". It tells you nothing of the dilemmas of youth facing its first emotional challenge. She could not face any dilemmas; she could have been a French count, a Bulgarian Earl or an Italian Duke, for we know of her emotional reactions to the graphic loss of her virginity. Kashmir is more entangled and on some rare occasions even credible. Except that Sibal's continuum of pre-parade activities and present day realities of the situation confuse the reader.

So what if it is fiction? It surely is not fantasy. Shahnaz's freedom in consorting with the terrorists, militants, freedom fighters whatever, in the period she is writing about, pre-1947—is as unreal as her relationship with Aslam Sheikh—the only person who seemed to have later defined her attitude towards people. The defining moment in the relationship takes place at the Martand Temple, where Shahnaz, who had supposedly gone to help in a meeting of volunteers fighting the Maharaja, takes herself away from it all, and sits within the temple, waiting for Aslam Sheikh to declare his love, when clearly he is busy organizing, not very effectively as it turns out, and who can blame him? A protest rally or protection from the Maharaja's goons, the workers!

"High mountains towered behind them, and their movements were dwarfed by the immense blue emptiness of sky above (sic). My love for Aslam Sheikh was complete and free-standing, a huge block of silence in my blood. (Love clearly affects people in different ways!) I saw him among the others, with his back to me, facing the workers, his hair thinning at the top, narrow bony shoulders, arms moving forcefully in wide shirt-sleeves as he talked. My heart was full of pain, he seemed so distant and separate. When would he come to me? I fled into a smaller chamber, a crypt, and sat cross-legged on the floor, waiting. A smell of bats came from dark, cold corners. Slowly the sun rose and began to beat at the bottom of a golden receptacle, the womb, Hiranyagarbha, being offered up as sacrifice." The significance is mind-numbing.

"Fiery red balls dropped from the sun through the air, and spread in my eyes, hands, ears. The heat explored my head (sic) each black hair followed to its glossy root.

"Why have you been hiding here? I've been looking for you. Aziz told me you he saw you coming in this direction." His voice was behind me. I scrambled up from the stone floor.

"I could only have been here, the plateau is bare except for this temple. You were busy."

"I wanted to get away with you somewhere. Somehow in Srinagar everything's mixed up. Listen, Shahnaz, I think we should get married."

I stared at him.

"Anyone would have, what with the sun, the bats and the Hiranyagarbha."

It is this rather banal style that makes the rest of the book such painful reading. Even if one can forget the plot, such as it is, disbelief does not suspend itself so willingly. Because Aslam Sheikh had

The Dogs of Justice



NINA SIBAL

proposed to her, Shahnaz, a "foreign-returned" "educated girl", agrees to blow up a bridge. How would she know how to do it in the first place? And in the process kills off a geologist, whose memory, through his widow, comes to haunt her during her later exploits.

Shahnaz's marriage to Ranbir and their subsequent posting to Athens, where, believe it or not, Ranbir has an illegitimate daughter, starts a kind of fading-out process of Shahnaz. She becomes more puppet-like than before, even when her husband's illegitimate daughter makes what can only be called a "pass" at her. But the thread is still there, in the story, I mean. It only tends to get lost sometimes in the myriad characters introduced and then discarded by the author, and in the pages of description of Greece that would have done the Greek Tourist Board proud. Frankly, I found it extremely tedious.

I shall skip over Shahnaz's obsession with, maybe even identification with the figure of the dancer from Mohenjo-Daro that she sees for the first time in the Museum. Merely because what appears to be a cataclysmic impact on Shahnaz of a well known icon, makes no sense. It does nothing to alter her behaviour or her perceptions. Not that we are told what they are, her perceptions, I mean. Perhaps it is an effort of the author to inject some amount of mystery into a dull, trite character, who knows?

Jabalpur would have been more of the same, the puppets, the myriad confusing and irrelevant characters cavorting against the newspaper-headline montage of events related to the gas tragedy in Bhopal and the controversy over the Narmada dam. However, here Shahnaz is up to her old habits, getting her pleasure from one

Hiren Shah, an evil, corrupt bureaucrat, (whose wife leaves him to lead the protest against the dam a la Medha Patkar), who accepts bribes, engineers violence and doesn't care for his daughter, oddly named Kinshasa. Talk of stereotypes. But it is in this chapter, or phase, in those portions dealing with Monica, a war-widow turned environmental activist, that Sibal suddenly shows her potential as a writer. The creation of that small community in Jabalpur, characters such as Ghafoor, hold a promise for this young writer. Her style needs tightening, her characters need filling-out and interminable descriptions of natural beauty, when wrongly introduced, move the focus of the narrative, leaving behind a blur.

The killing of Ghafoor, the natural assumption of leadership by Monica reads like passages from another book, hopefully one that Sibal will concentrate on: Listen to this:

"A tall, striking figure lit by a torch, her booming words focussed attention immediately. Groups stopped leaving, joined the procession led by Shri Bhairavi and his three young ladies (in my view an editorial slip) who fanned out as winged lieutenants, nudging the scattered tribals back into a broad river of people which began to move from the school down the road towards the Empire Cinema. The students and others rallied at the margins. Committee members distributed themselves at strategic points. Mrs Monica walked, a strong figure of grace. . . ." As Monica dies, (as related by a journalist besotted by her) Sibal comes out with what in my view is probably one of the most touching and at the same time, witty and sensitive paras in the book.

"A red patch was moving to the front of her blouse, staining the pallu of her sari. I couldn't see her wounds. 'Oh look up there', she said to me. A brilliant full moon floated in a few clouds, against a deep night sky. 'I'm glad we didn't go in after all. To look at a painted Italian ceiling just now wouldn't be appropriate.'

Returning to the rather dreary Shahnaz once more, this time in Dehra Dun, we get more of the same, the trivial details, Shahnaz's inability to withstand a proposition even from a person she admits she did not even like, and Ranbir's suicide as Shahnaz cavorts in a thundershower watched by her unfortunate daughter, we're back to the banality and posturing. The legacy Shahnaz spoke of at the beginning of the book is a saga any daughter would be happy to forget.

Arundhati Ghose is a retired Foreign Service officer.

Rereading Manto

Antara Datta

LIFE AND WORKS OF SAADAT HASAN MANTO

Edited by Alok Bhalla

IIAS, Shimla, 1997, pp. 220, Rs. 240.00

The history of twentieth century literature of the subcontinent is unimaginable without the mention of Saadat Hasan Manto. With the nuclear arms race recharging the atmosphere of extant violence between India and Pakistan, it is imperative that we look back at history and learn a few lessons. Reading Manto in the current context therefore, becomes important not only for aesthetic pleasure but also for retrieving those lost notes which have sunk beneath our complacency and historical amnesia.

Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto edited by Alok Bhalla is a compilation of papers presented at a seminar on Manto in Shimla in May 1996. This collection is a serious attempt at providing a comprehensive assessment of Manto's life and literary career. Divided into seventeen chapters, the thematic and spatial canvas of this book is wide-ranging, giving expression to the disparate and heterogeneous response that Manto attracts in the contemporary literary context.

A substantial portion of the collection consists of discriminating biographical portraits of Manto, which try to locate him within the turbulent socio-political milieu, which he inhabited and inscribed. Bhisham Sahni's "Saadat Hasan Manto: A Note", Abdul Bismillah's "A reading of 'Pandit' Manto's Letter to Pandit Nehru", Shamin Hanfi's "Manto—The person and the Myth" and Indra Nath Chaudhari's "A Note on Some Myths About Manto", reveal diverse facets of Manto's chequered history, his political and literary predilections and the myths which surround his persona. What is unique in this effort is that for the first time an attempt has been made to put together contradictory and complementary evidence about Manto in a single collection. This enterprise

A substantial portion of the collection consists of discriminating biographical portraits of Manto, which try to locate him within the turbulent socio-political milieu, which he inhabited and inscribed.

not only brings to light hitherto unknown facts about Manto but also contextualises previous appraisals of this controversial writer. Manto is best remembered for his uncompromising 'truthfulness' in the depiction of the horrors of Partition. Manto's contribution in creating an alternative space where the discussion on Partition gathers newer and more disturbing ramifications remains unparalleled. The demographic and cultural dislocations initiated by the Partition had a direct impact on Manto. It was difficult for him to maintain a uniform sense of identity and this led him to ask questions like "Who am I? What is my status? ... my soul is restless. That is why I am sometimes in a lunatic asylum and sometimes in a hospital. . ." (p. 184). This personal crisis expressed itself in some of the best fiction written by Manto. "Toba Tek Singh", "Khol Do", "1919 Ki Ek Baat", "Kali Shalwar" are accepted as some of the most acerbic and authentic fictional documentations of the blackest phase of the post-independence subcontinent. Alok Bhalla's "A Dance of Grotesque Masks", Shashi Joshi's "The World of Saadat Hasan Manto" and Keki K. Daruwala's "The Craft of Manto: Warts and All", are primarily concerned with the analyses of Manto's fictional strategies and ideology with special reference to the works cited earlier. These discussions are far from homogeneous and do justice to the complex questions that Manto's fiction repeatedly raises. Manto's conception of historical processes and their implications on the lives of those who participate in them directly or indirectly is a central idea in his fictional expositions. Manto was not interested in portraying the Partition as an impersonal political decision but implicated the masses who reinforced the cruelty which this historical event unleashed. Manto's prose spares no one. For him evil is as much individual as it is collective. As most of the critics in the collection point out, Manto's politics questioning the validity of the opinion which saw independence as an epiphanic moment in the history of the subcontinent. Manto's ideology provoked him to bring to focus those who have been marginalized

and relegated to the periphery of conventional society. Harish Narang points out, "Manto's choice of pimps and prostitutes... as subjects is not accidental. It was an essential part of this ideology—an ideology which foregrounds the lives of the marginalized and subaltern with the clear objective of not only changing the course of the majority discourse but to subvert it" (p. 87).

Manto's portrayal of the unprivileged, and the world-view behind his characterizations is approached from various perspectives in this collection. Sukrita Paul Kumar's essay concerns itself solely with the construction of women and femininity in Manto's works. She finds in Manto "an androgynous sensibility in unravelling the existential stirrings of women..." she adds, "Given a feminist reading, his stories show how literature can become a potent weapon in disturbing the established modes of existence. . ." (pp. 103, 112). Keki Daruwala questions the effectiveness of Manto's craft and with his characteristic touch of original critical insight argues that though Manto's "heart is in the right place and he writes against the male exploitation of the wife, the woman, the prostitute. . . But strong feeling does not necessarily for strong art" (p. 61). Where most critics, despite their differences, unquestionably accept the social and socialist motivation behind most of Manto's creativity, scholars like Daruwala and Shashi Joshi emphasise his similarity with modern existentialist writers and insist that "his stories are anti-ideology, anti-heroic, anti-salvationist (and that he was) opposed to offering 'ideology as resolution of and salvation for individuals and societies'" (p. 157). The book accommodates these contradictory assessments of Manto with remarkable balance and objectivity.

No discussion of Manto could be complete without an understanding of Manto's own perception of the role of

art and the artist. The sense of anguish that most of his works exude is an expression of Manto's preoccupation with what he thought as fit subjects for the artistic enterprise. Manto had been accused throughout his literary career of assaulting the sensibility of his readers and crossing the bounds of decency. Manto in answer to these charges showed a tremendous sense of dedication to what he thought to be his function as an artist, and nothing could detract him from his beliefs. He said, "I believe nothing is obscene in itself—things are made obscene on purpose. . . We writers are no Prophets, whatever we understand true or false, we present to our readers. . . I am an artist. I do not like shabby wounds" (pp. 72, 78, 218). Gopi Chand Narang, Shâimim Hameed and Tarannum Riaz discuss Manto's role as a writer in considerable detail. Tejwant Singh Gill reads Manto in the context of some well-known Punjabi writers to show the correspondence and divergences between them. The book, through extensive quotes and extracts from Manto's autobiographical writings and statements, is able to construct a complex picture of Manto's ideas and preferences.

Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto has been published at a time when the subcontinent is engaged in reassessing its history and 'achievements'. This introspection has forced the literary world to re-read writers like Manto in the contemporary context not only because he was a unique and challenging writer but also because the issues raised by him in his fiction continue to plague us even today. The collection encompasses an amazing range of perspectives which allows the reader to assess Manto and his fictional world in all the complexities they deserve.

Antara Datta teaches in Delhi University.

Communication

Locationality of the Expatriate Indian Scholar

I wish to correct an inadvertent editorial slip that seems to have crept in my review of R.S. Khare's 'Cultural Diversity and Social Discontent' (*The Book Review*, Vol. XXII No. 8, August 1998). The published sentence is "I have personally known a scholar much more senior and distinguished than Professor Khare, an expatriate Indian social scientist, who would not let him speak in India on the Indian campuses on the logic of 'What right and authority do you have?'" In my original typescript the sentence reads as follows:

"I have personally known a scholar much more senior and distinguished than Professor Khare, an expatriate social scientist, with tears in his eyes, expressing deep anguish at Indian colleagues who would not let him (this senior scholar) speak in India on the Indian campuses on the logic 'What right and authority do you have?'"

The correction is important as it impinges crucially on the delicate issue of locationality of the expatriate Indian scholar.

Ravindra K. Jain

BOOK NEWS

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AGRICULTURE

Choice: Making the Most of New Choices for Small Farmers
 Edited by John R. Witcombe, Daljit S. John Farrington
 This book provides an in depth analysis of the regulatory frameworks that cover the testing, release and dissemination of new crop varieties. The book is addressed to all those concerned with crop improvement such as plant breeders and agricultural extensionists, agricultural development workers, including researchers, policy makers, donors, voluntary agencies and commercial seed producers.
 Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 271, Rs. 350.00

CULTURAL STUDIES

Caste and Folk Culture
 Edited by Pasayat
 This book is an exploration of an area that is significant but largely ignored. It focuses on many important aspects of the folk culture and oral traditions of Orissa. Besides relating the revivalism of folk culture to the emerging local socio-economic and political aspirations of the elite and the persistence of the folk tradition, the author also tried to establish the distinctiveness of Sambalpuri folk culture through separate interactions over centuries.
 Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 332, Rs. 300.00

ECONOMY

Planning and Economic Policy in India: A Review and Lessons for the Future
 Edited by Manabendu Chattopadhyay, Maiti, Mihir Rakshit.
 This volume provides a comprehensive and critical appraisal of the planning process and economic policies followed in India till 1991. The contributors make explicit policy recommendations in the context of the economic reforms initiated in 1991. And not only does the book make a significant contribution to the current debate on economic reforms, it also draws attention to various unresolved issues and dilemmas. Useful to scholars and students of economics, macroeconomic theory and development studies.
 Sage Publications, 1996, pp. 215, Rs. 295.00 (hard cover), Rs. 175.00 (paper)

Korean Economic Miracle.
 Edited by E. De Souza

This book focuses mainly on the rise and growth of the South Korean economy; the developmental process in South Korea, within the context of India's own development strategy. While analyzing the economic problems facing South Korea, the author is equally on the underlying issues that have helped and fostered, and sustained this high rate of expansion together with the structural changes that have accompanied it.
 Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 237, Rs. 250.00

Post-Green Revolution Rural Punjab: A Profile of Economic and Socio-Cultural Change (1965-95)

B L Abbi, Kesar Singh

Villages in India have always been linked to the wider society through a variety of social, economic, cultural and political institutional processes. An attempt is made here to show how these processes of movement and change have socially and culturally transformed the village and its constituent groups and categories, their existential conditions, modes of mutual interrelatedness and the interlinkages with the outside world have changed.

Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, 1997, pp. 157 Rs. 195.00

■ EDUCATION

The contested Terrain : Perspectives on Education in India

Edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

This collection of essays aims at providing a comparative and historical perspective on education in modern India. These essays have a bearing on the long-run developments in the Indian educational system leading up to the status of education in our own times.

Orient Longman, 1998, pp. 446, Rs. 425.00

■ DEVELOPMENT

A psychological Strategy for Alternative Human Development : India's Performance since Independence

Prayag Mehta

This comprehensive and authoritative work identifies a large number of inter-related issues which affect human development in India. Wide-ranging field-work supported by appropriate data form the backdrop for detailed discussions of the country's programmes for poverty alleviation, health care, literacy, primary education, and for protecting forests and the environment. The book will be useful to scholars in the fields of political science, management, education, psychology, behavioural sciences, development studies, public administration and activists involved with grassroots development.

Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 252. Rs. 375.00

■ GENDER STUDIES

Violence Against Women

Ram Ahuja

This book raises several questions and examines aspects of violence and some more crucial issues with a sociological perspective. It also assesses the rehabilitation of victims of violence and proposes a number of initiatives to tackle this disturbing phenomenon. Providing a balance between practical and theoretical issues and concerns, the book will be especially useful to sociologists, criminologists, psychologists, women activists and social and health care workers.

Issues in Intimate Violence

Raquel Kennedy Bergen

Designed specifically for undergraduate students, this volume provides a comprehensive and accessible anthology that prepares the foundation for understanding a wide range of violence that commonly occurs in families and between intimates. Many articles offer a feminist perspective that addresses the gendered nature of violence and the consequences of power inequality in our society.

Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 314, \$58.00 (cloth), \$26.95 (paper).

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths and Adults

Knowledge for Human Services Practice.

Shri Hunter, Coleen Shannon, Jo Knox, James I. Martin

This volume is a practical guide to developing a deeper understanding of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons and empowers human service professionals to work more comfortably and effectively with these communities. The book begins with an overview of controversies regarding causation and concludes with a thoughtful overview of the changes from oppressive to affirmative practice.

Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 222, \$47.50 (cloth), \$21.00 (paper)

■ HISTORY

Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean world
Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta

Edited by Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian

Dedicated to Professor Ashin Das Gupta, one of the pioneers of maritime history, this volume of essays elaborate some of the major recent themes in the history of the Indian Ocean. Between the ocean and the hinterland, to the organization of mercantile networks in literate societies, and to the connection between politics and trade. Some of these issues were identified by Professor Das Gupta himself in the course of his researches. This volume addresses these same issues from new and changing perspectives of transitional politics in India in the eighteenth century.
 Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 281, Rs. 425.00

Medicine and the Raj : British Medical Policy in India 1835-1911

Dr. Anil Kumar

The author unravels the political linkages and sociological interactions between Western medical science and the British Empire, focussing on the period 1835-1911. He also provides a contemporary critique of the imperialist-nationalist debate on research in medicine as also outlines the course of action the British ought to have taken to ameliorate suffering in India. The book will interest, historians, political scientists and sociologists.
 Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 246, Rs. 395.00

Communicating Prejudice

Michael L. Huht (Editor)

This volume examines the many dimensions of prejudice. It presents a new and integrative conceptual mode of prejudice, the layered perspective of cultural intolerance, and uses this model to analyze the communication of prejudice in a variety of spheres such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism and classism. A series of personal narratives makes this volume come to life, each describing an author's experience with prejudice in their personal and/or professional life.
 Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 404, \$65.50

■ LITERATURE

Writers of the Indian Diaspora: Theory and Practice

Edited by Jasbir Jain

Writers of the Indian diaspora have been fairly centre stage in the last decade primarily because of the theoretical formulations which are now being generated by the critiquing of their work and the growing interest in cultural studies. Diasporic writing raises the question of 'home' and 'nation'. The essays in the present volume address these and many more questions—perceptively, critically, and with compassion. The contributors are both from India and abroad, both Indians and non-Indians and hence the work represents perspectives located in different cultures.

Rawat Publications, 1998, pp. 216, Rs. 350.00

William Shakespeare : Canon and Critique
An Anthology of Recent Criticism

Edited by Leela Gandhi

Over the last two decades, Shakespeare studies have emerged as the favoured site for the practice of literary theory. Drawing upon recent work by scholars based in the Indian and Anglo-American Academy, this anthology offers a glimpse of the critical variety arising from Shakespearean texts. While the essays included here cover several competing methodologies and ideological perspectives, the volume showcases some new and significant feminist 'queer' re-evaluations of Shakespeare's plays and poems.
 Pencraft International, 1998, pp. 231, Rs. 350.00

First Comes the Night

Adhavan English Translation

R. Sundaresan

'First comes the Night' is the English translation of the Tamil short story collection 'Mudhalil Iravu Varum' by Sadhavan Sundaram, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987. The stories are noted for their innovative style, refreshing originality of theme and the power of intellectual analyses. The stories deal with the complexities of middle-class Tamil life, proves the predicament of the youth confronting a crisis of identity and seeks to come to terms with the generation gap.

Sahitya Akademi, 1998, pp. 140, Rs. 60.00

New from Oxford

Chandigarh : The making of an Indian City

Ravi Kalia

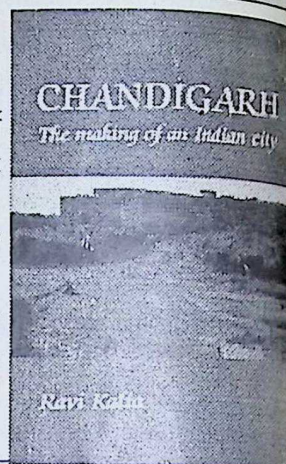
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'I find the book exceptionally fair and broadminded in its detailing of the history of the undertaking and for the characters involved, especially that of Le Corbusier himself.'

—Maxwell Fry, Architect, London

0 19 562311 8 215 X 140 mm 1998 220 pp. Rs 395 A



Reminiscences of Indian Wildlife

R.S. Dharmakumarsinhji

There are accounts of *shikar* as it was practised in Indian princely states such as the stalking of blackbuck with cheetah and falconry — royal hunting pastimes which have now vanished. Other shikar anecdotes include the author's experiences while hunting crocodile, chinkara (Indian gazelle), elephant and wild boar and the account of the man-eater which got away. Among the numerous first-hand accounts of sights seldom seen by humans in the Indian jungles are the ones of the mating of Gir lions, a fight between two adult Nilgai, and the stalking and killing of a blackbuck by a wolf. The book also gives details of a now rare bird, the Great Indian Bustard, and other fauna and avifauna which Dharmakumarsinhji was particularly interested in.

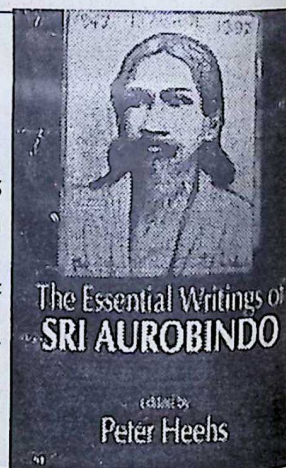
0 19 564255 4 215 X 140 mm 1998 112 pp. Rs 225 A

The Essential Writings of Sri Aurobindo

Peter Heehs

This volume includes writings covering more than fifty years (1893–1950) of Aurobindo's life, arranged in six sections according to his main areas of interest: politics, the Indian tradition, social and political theory, philosophy, yoga, poetry and poetics. There is a general introduction giving an overview of Sri Aurobindo's life and works, as well as brief introductions to each section, textual notes explaining references to persons and events, a glossary of Sanskrit terms, a chronology and suggestions for further reading.

0 19 564284 8 215 x 140 mm 1998 418 pp. Rs 595 A



Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru: Second Series, Volume 21

S. Gopal

The first quarter of 1953, covered by this volume of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, witnessed several national and international developments with far-reaching implications for society and politics in India. Within India, the foundations were being laid of a modern industrial and agrarian economy. The First Five Year Plan was thus the manifesto of a new era of national reconstruction and social regeneration, which would rest upon the creative energies of a united nation. Further, the concept of a mixed economy, which would rest upon the equally upon the strengths of the public and the private sectors for the common good of the people.

0 19 564539 1 1998 245 x 160 mm 682 pp. Rs 500 A



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